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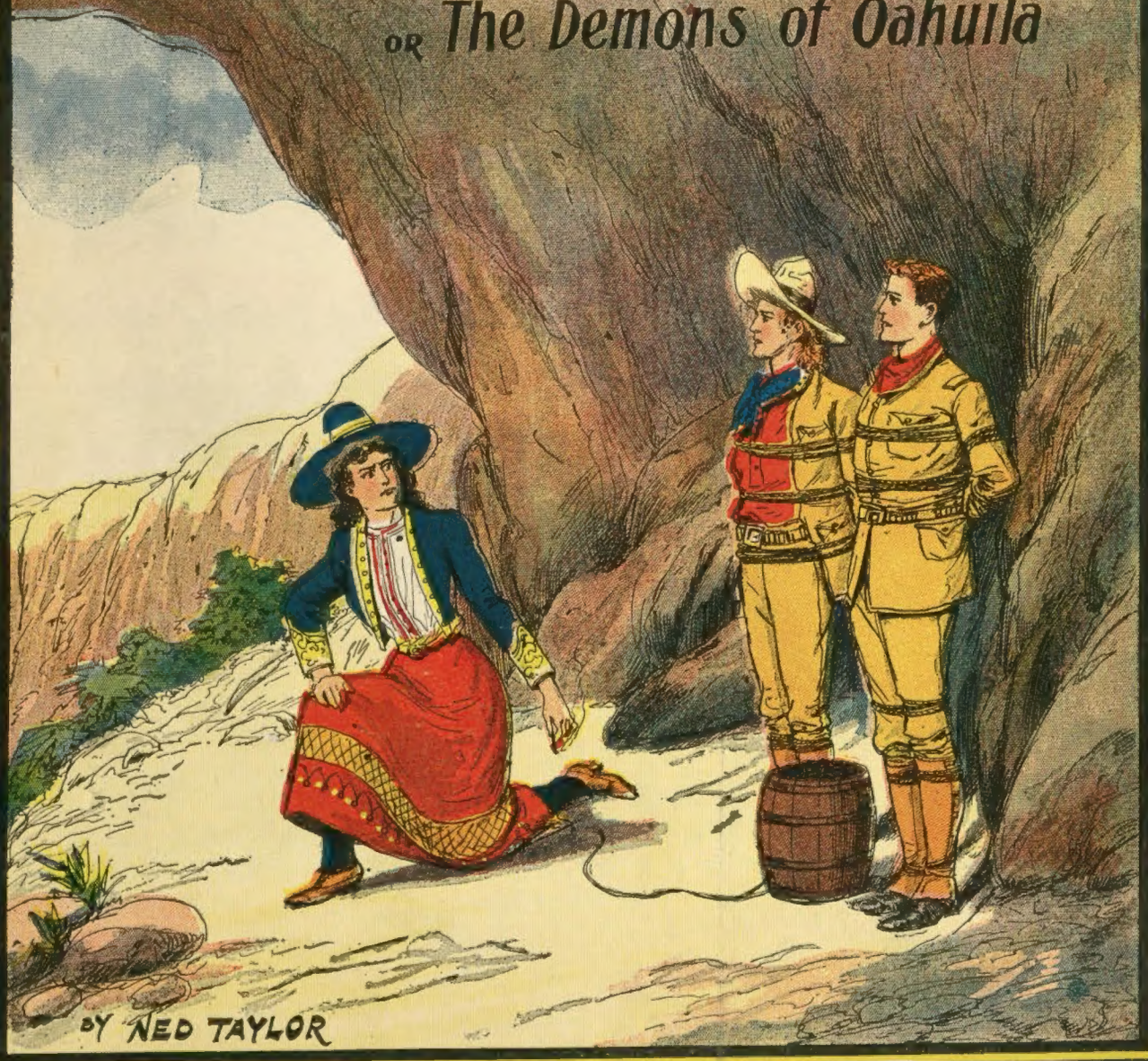
Young Rough Riders Weekly

MOST FASCINATING WESTERN STORIES

TED STRONG'S TREASURE HUNT

OR The Demons of Oahuila



"Senors," exclaimed the Mexican girl friend, as she stopped to light the fuse. "Pray fast, for time flies. You die quickly! The treasures of Obigia are not for you!"

The Young Rough Riders Weekly

Most Fascinating Western Stories

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TED STRONG'S TREASURE HUNT;

OR,

The Demons of Coahuila.

By NED TAYLOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE STRIKE.

If it had not been for a strike in the cabinet department of the Halborne Furniture Company's factory of Grand Rapids, Michigan, this story would probably never have been written.

Had it not been for that strike, Max Morton would probably have still been the star reporter on one of the leading daily papers of that city, and would never have thought of such a thing as taking a trip to old Mexico.

It was on a Monday afternoon in the month of August, when, shortly after Morton had appeared before his city editor ready to receive his afternoon's assignment of a story to run down, he was allotted the task of looking up certain details in connection with a strike of the employees at the Halborne factory.

The men had walked out about the middle of the forenoon, and the noon editions of the evening papers had "played the story up" like a real piece of news.

It was important news, too, for the Halborne factory was one of the largest furniture manufacturing concerns of a city of world-wide fame as a furniture manufacturing center.

"Inside information has reached us that the employees have threatened to destroy the factory, if their demands are not complied with," said the city editor to Morton. "Keep your eyes wide open, and watch the situation carefully. If there is any destruction of property, we want the first crack at the story. Mix in with the men all you can."

With these parting instructions ringing in his ears, Morton slipped the clipping regarding the strike from the noon papers into his pocket, and started for the factory.

Arriving near the big shops, he found the factory yard and nearby streets crowded with discontented-looking men, most of whom were striking laborers.

He learned, through quiet inquiry, that a delegation of men, who were representing the strikers, were now in

the private office of the company having an interview with the stockholders and officers of the furniture concern.

Morton knew that the result of that conference would be all-important—that it would determine whether the laborers would go back to work immediately or not; and he cast about for some plan of getting intelligence of the outcome of the conference at the quickest possible moment.

Meanwhile he mixed in with the strikers, listened to their snatches of conversation, and picked up what news he could of the situation from the laborers' standpoint.

The strikers were evidently waiting for the announcement of the result of the conference.

The men were not loud in their complaints, nor did they show any signs of violence. Nevertheless, fifteen or twenty policemen in uniform had been detailed to watch the crowd to prevent any riotous acts.

It was not many minutes after his arrival on the scene before the ever-watchful Morton saw the door of the office of the factory manager swing open, and several men come forth and mingle with the crowd of strikers.

He knew that they were the representatives of the laborers, and that they had just closed their conference with the factory owners.

They were ready to report the result of that conference.

With scores of strikers, Morton pushed his way to the front to listen to what the foreman of the strikers' representatives had to say.

Morton succeeded in getting quite close to the man who was evidently about to address the laborers.

This man had taken a position upon a low pile of lumber, and now raised his hand for silence.

"Boys," he commenced, addressing the strikers, "it's all off. The factory owners will not come to terms yet. They claim they are now paying us too much in wages. They will not raise our wages unless we will agree to work two hours longer each day."

The words seemed to have an instant effect on the strikers.

There were loud, angry shouts from every part of the crowd.

"Tear down the old shop!"

"Let's set it on fire!"

"We ain't slaves!"

"Let's show the rich cusses that we are real men!"

It was plainly to be seen that the laborers were only waiting for a leader to resort to almost any means of vengeance on their former employers and the owners of the factory.

And the enraged strikers had not long to wait for a leader. Suddenly a large, rawboned man pulled himself out of the crowd and climbed the lumber pile.

His first words could not be heard because of the rabble of the crowd, but soon from the mouths of the strikers came cries of recognition.

"Shut up, fellows!"

"It's Hank Oleson!"

"The terrible Swede!"

"What is it, Hank? Let the Swede talk!"

Still it was several moments before the man designated as Hank Oleson, the terrible Swede, could make himself heard.

The first words that Morton could understand were: "We must have revenge, boys! Who will help me set fire to the blamed old factory?"

"Hurrah for Hank!"

"Lead the way, old boy; we're all with you!"

There was much shouting and waving of hands.

Hank Oleson jumped from the lumber pile and started toward the rear of the factory building, scores of strikers following him, shouting words of encouragement and uttering cries of hatred toward the owners of the big furniture plant.

They were aroused to the highest pitch of madness and in trim for almost any sort of lawlessness. It was very evident that they were set upon carrying out the proposition of the terrible Swede. They meant to set fire to the factory.

When the Swede started from the rear of the factory, it was the cue for the police to interfere. A sergeant, who was evidently in charge of the policemen, gave a quick order to his men and dashed into the thickest of the crowd of angry strikers, followed bravely by the other officers.

But the strikers were in earnest.

They seemed to believe that they were fighting for their just rights. They believed that the factory management was defrauding them in expecting them to work for small wages. In their mad fury they now thought of nothing except their desire for revenge.

Twenty policemen were no match for a great crowd. The few officers of the law could, at the most, but delay the execution of the plans of the strikers for a few seconds.

The strikers were too frenzied to respect the blue uniforms and the brass buttons. They turned and fought back the representatives of the law.

While a large portion of the strikers fought with and held back the policemen, others rushed forward and assisted Hank Oleson in starting a fire at the corner of the factory.

Within five minutes the building was in flames.

The fire had been started at one corner and rapidly climbed to the roof of the big wooden structure, which was two stories in height.

Max Morton had mixed right in with the crowd. He was alert. He had watched every detail, and he had succeeded in getting close to the terrible Swede. He had seen every act of that villain, but made no move to inter-

fere with the man, realizing that there were too many against him.

But as Hank lighted the match which started the fire, and threw it into the large pile of oily waste which had been placed near the doomed building, Morton had seen an individual, who had been apparently one of the crowd of strikers, suddenly rush from the crowd and endeavor to kick the flaming waste away from the building.

This individual seemed to be trying to save the structure.

The man who had thus endeavored to save the property had a striking personality, which Morton could not fail to note.

He was dressed strangely for that part of the country, and was plainly a foreigner.

In fact the man was a Mexican, and was dressed much after the style of his native soil.

He wore a wide-brimmed felt hat with a fancy, corded band, a blue cotton shirt, a large, colored handkerchief knotted at his throat, and brown trousers flaring at the bottom and split at the sides from the knees down. His coat was a common sack coat.

He had the dark eyes and dark hair of his race, and Max noticed that the man's eyes flashed fire as he rushed forward to obstruct the work of the Swede.

But the brave act of the Mexican was for naught.

With a curse upon his lips, Oleson sprang at the Mexican and delivered a stinging blow with his fist in the man's face.

The blow landed on the point of the Mexican's jaw. His kick delivered at the pile of waste fell short by several inches as he fell backward.

At that instant Morton heard the strident ringing of an alarm gong.

He recognized the sound. It was the gong under the police "hurry-up" wagon or under the vehicle used by the fire-marshal hurrying to fires.

He glanced quickly around and discovered the police emergency wagon approaching, the horses hitched to it coming at a fierce gallop.

Some one had rung up the police station for re-enforcements for the police.

Eight or ten fresh policemen were in the wagon, and the driver was forcing his horses to their utmost exertions. He was driving them madly right toward the crowd of frenzied strikers.

The shouting, angry men fell back quickly to prevent being run down, leaving an open avenue for the police wagon.

The horses were directed straight toward the body of the prostrate Mexican, who had vainly tried to put out the fire.

The Mexican had not been rendered unconscious, but he was well-nigh helpless, and his mind had been confused from the heavy blow administered by the terrible Swede.

Max Morton saw that there was one chance in a hundred to save the man from being run over by the madly advancing horses and the heavy wagon to which they were attached.

The driver of the wagon could not see the prostrate body in his path, and there was now no time to warn him.

Hardly thinking of what he was about, his sole thought being to save the brave Mexican if possible, Max Morton sprang toward the helpless man.

The young, strong reporter reached the man's side.

With an almost superhuman effort, Max grasped the man's shoulders and started to draw him to one side.

The next second he felt some hard object hit him forcibly on the back of his head!

Everything seemed to grow dark before his eyes!

Then he knew no more!

CHAPTER II.

THE DEATH OF THE MEXICAN.

It was the day following the riot of the strikers at the big furniture plant.

The factory had been burned to the ground.

Hank Oleson, the terrible Swede, and many of his companions, had been arrested, and were now confined behind iron bars awaiting their trials and sentences.

The story of the riot and the burning of the great furniture plant was printed in glaring type in the morning papers, but none of the details had been written by Max Morton, the star newspaper reporter.

For the first time in his experience Morton had fallen down on an assignment.

But his excuse was a good one.

He had been lying in an unconscious condition, hovering between life and death, in one of the city hospitals.

Doctors and nurses had been constantly hovering over him. The chances for his recovery or for his death were deemed about the same.

It was not until the middle of the forenoon of the day after the fire that the young man finally returned to consciousness. Then it was that the physicians first announced that his life would probably be spared.

Max had been struck upon the back of the skull by the tongue of the police wagon. He had been knocked down, and the horses and wagon had passed clear over his body.

Happily the horses' hoofs had not struck his body, and he had escaped the heavy wheels by the fraction of an inch.

It was feared that he had suffered concussion of the brain, but before noon the doctors declared the young man safe and certain of recovery.

But how fared it with the Mexican?

He had also been taken to the same hospital in which Max had found himself.

Shortly after noon Max thought of the man for the first time. He motioned one of the nurses to his side, and asked:

"Was the Mexican injured? Did he escape?"

"Was he a friend of yours?" asked the discreet nurse.

"No," replied Max. "I never saw him until yesterday. I do not know his name."

"Then I will tell you that the doctors say the man cannot recover. He is not unconscious, but he cannot live the day out. He was fatally injured."

"Then my effort was in vain?" asked Max.

"Yes, my boy," replied the nurse. "You did not succeed in saving the man's life, but your brave act in trying to do so is none the less praiseworthy. I dare say your act has been recorded in heaven."

"I am so sorry," Max murmured.

"Sorry that a good deed has been recorded for you?" asked the nurse, smiling.

"No, not that," returned Max, with a feeble, answering smile. "I am sorry that the man cannot live. He was a brave man, and, although one of the strikers, he endeavored to prevent Hank Oleson from firing the factory building."

"Why, is that so?" asked the nurse. "It does not say so in the paper this morning. It merely states that one of the strikers was probably fatally injured while attempting to resist the advance of the police wagon, and that, in attempting to save the man's life after he had been knocked down, you were seriously injured."

"Then I wish you would do me a favor," said Morton. "Call up the paper on which I work and ask that the city editor send a reporter to me. I want this unknown man to have his just dues. His was a brave act."

The nurse agreed to carry out the request of the young reporter and hurried away.

Meantime, in an adjoining ward of the hospital, doctors were working over the injured body of the Mexican.

They were doing everything in their power to save the man, but they were certain that his case was hopeless.

The man was injured internally, as well as suffering with a broken shoulder and two broken legs.

It was plainly to be seen that the Mexican knew that his chances for life were slight indeed.

He had remained conscious through all his sufferings, and had refused to take any narcotic of any kind while being operated upon.

He had borne the pains caused by the sharp knives and instruments of the surgeons without a moan. He had shown great nerve.

But, finally, with features pinched with pain and sunken eyes, from which the spark of hope had departed, the Mexican looked up into the face of the physician who was bending over him, and in feeble tones asked:

"It's all up with me, eh, doctor?"

The man had used perfect English. There was hardly a trace of foreign accent in his language.

The doctor looked down at his patient, and knew instantly that the Mexican suspected the worst.

"I am afraid that your life will soon end, my brave man," he replied.

"And how is it with the brave boy who tried to save me? Don't tell me that he will die."

"The lad will live," said the physician.

"Praise God, then! I can die happy!" were the astonishing exclamations of the doomed man.

The Mexican's face seemed to some extent to regain a satisfied, peaceful expression.

The dying man closed his eyes, and for a long time seemed to be peacefully sleeping. But he was not sleeping—only thinking.

At last he reopened his eyes, and his gaze rested upon the face of the doctor. Finally he spoke:

"You are certain that the boy will live?"

"Yes," was the answer.

"He is now out of danger?"

"Yes. The lad is still in bed, but will be able to leave the hospital in a day or so."

"How long can I live?"

"Not long, I am afraid."

"A few hours?"

"Not many hours," replied the doctor.

There was a silence for several minutes; then the Mexican asked another question:

"May I see the young man who tried to save my life before I die?"

"You wish to thank him?"

"Yes, and to—— May I see him?"

"Wait a few moments, and I will let you know," replied the doctor, leaving the room.

A moment or two later the physician returned with the welcome information that Max Morton would be carried into the ward occupied by the Mexican, that the latter might thank the lad for trying to save his life.

Half an hour later Morton was assisted to the side of the dying man's cot, wheeled in an invalid chair.

"I am so sorry, my brave man, that you cannot live," was Morton's greeting.

"Don't mind that, my boy, but let me thank you for trying to save my life. It was a noble effort, and one which will not be forgotten by the angels in heaven."

For nearly half an hour the Mexican was engaged in asking the young man all sorts of questions. He learned from Morton's answers that Max was practically alone in the world, that he had no near relatives, and that he depended upon his own resources.

He learned that Max was working hard to make a

name for himself in his chosen profession, and that his wages were exceedingly small for the amount of work required of him.

Morton could hardly understand why the dying Mexican should take such a great interest in his personal affairs, but he was to learn the reason for it all later. A great surprise was in store for him.

At the end of half an hour the Mexican was plainly becoming weaker and weaker. At last, in the middle of a sentence, he was forced to stop speaking. Blood gathered in his throat, and was soon flowing from his mouth.

The dreaded renewal of an internal hemorrhage, which the doctor knew would be shortly followed by the man's death, had come.

For five minutes the blood seemed to come in a steady stream.

The man's life was close to an end. Death was but a few minutes, perhaps seconds, away.

With a longing, eager expression the man kept looking toward Morton. He plainly wished to say something of importance to the young man before he died.

At last the blood seemed to stop flowing for a minute. The man reached out and caught Morton's hands.

"You—risked—your—own—l-i-f-e—t-o save m-me," said the dying man, with great difficulty. "I w-a-n-t you —to——take—t-h-i-s. G-e-t t-h-e t-r-e-a-s-u-r-e!"

With the last words the Mexican thrust his hand into the bosom of his shirt and brought to view a shabby, long, leathern pocketbook. This he extended feebly toward Max Morton.

When he saw that Max Morton had possession of his gift, the Mexican fell back heavily upon the pillow, exhausted.

A second later he opened his eyes and looked into the face of Morton.

His lips moved, but what he was trying to say Max never knew.

Then a smile appeared upon the face of the dying Mexican. He closed his eyes again, then feebly crossed himself.

A second later a pallor spread over his features. His limbs grew suddenly stiff, and the watchers knew that the man was dead.

With tender hands the physician and the nurse, who had been standing near, folded the hands of the dead, unknown Mexican.

A few minutes later Max was wheeled back into his own room of the hospital and left alone, with the mysterious gift of the dying Mexican in his hand.

CHAPTER III.

MESSAGE FROM BEN TREMONT.

In order to give the reader a proper understanding and conception of all the details of this story, it will now be necessary to take him from the hospital quarters of Max Morton in Grand Rapids, Mich., far across the country westward and southward, to Texas.

The scene shifts to the dining room of a comfortable, well-built and large ranch house in Dimmit County, Texas, a scene familiar to many readers of this story. It is the dining room of the Los Animas Ranch house, the home of the famous young rough riders who had been organized by Ted Strong.

Three of the young rough riders were in the room, just engaged in finishing their dinners.

Ted Strong, the fearless, accomplished, handsome young leader of the company was seated at the head of the table, and held an open letter in his hand, as if about to read the contents to his two companions.

Bud Morgan, the oldest member of the company—he of the small stature, of the corn-colored, long-hanging hair—was seated at the left of his famous captain, while at Ted's right sat the versatile Bob Martin.

While Bud was noted for his bravery, he was not educated like the rest of the members of Ted Strong's company. He, unlike any other member of the company, had spent most of his life in the West. His schoolroom had been the wide-stretching prairies. His teacher had been Dame Necessity.

His life had been wild and free.

But he was, nevertheless, one of the favorite members of the band of young rough riders. He was Ted's most ardent admirer. And his services had always been most valuable.

Bob Martin was also a valuable member of the company, and, while he was not as good a shot as some of the others, nor as expert a horseman, he was what Bud Morgan called "gamey," and he was brave.

One of the favorite members of Ted's company, Ben Tremont, the giant of the combination, the man of great strength, was conspicuous by his absence.

But, if the reader will listen to Ted Strong's remarks, as he unfolds the letter in his hand, Ben's absence will be duly accounted for.

Ted had been to the post office that forenoon, and had brought the letter with him on his return to the ranch. As he drew the envelope from his pocket, he announced:

"I have a letter from Ben, boys, and it contains some startling information. I am going to read it to you, and I want you to listen carefully."

"Where is Ben now?" asked Bud Morgan.

"This letter is dated from the little mountain town of Coro, in the State of Coahuila," answered Ted.

"In old Mexico?"

"Yes."

"Let 'er go," said Bud.

Ted opened the letter and read as follows:

"My Dear Ted, and the Rest of the Bunch: I have succeeded in tracing the stolen cattle to this town, and have learned the names of several of the villains who ran them off the Los Animas Ranch. But I find myself unable to cope with the rustlers alone. I find here a regular organized band of criminals, and the men we want belong to this gang, though in stealing our cattle they apparently acted independent of their gang. However, they are now protected by the others, and cannot be gotten at without great danger. I have been spotted and have received notice to leave the country or take chances of being killed. This gang of thieves and cutthroats is composed mostly of Mexicans and half-breeds, but there are a few American outlaws mixed up with it. The outlaws have a stronghold somewhere in the mountains near here. They have committed all kinds of depredations, and have terrorized the whole country hereabouts. Their latest atrocity was holding up a caravan of ore wagons carrying silver ore from one of the big mountain mines. The wagons seemed to have been well guarded. Several of the guards were killed, and all of the ore was taken by the desperadoes.

"Let me know whether to expect you down here soon, or if you wish me to drop the case and start for home. I will remain here until I get a reply.

"Ben Tremont."

When Ted had finished reading, he looked up expectantly toward his two companions.

"What do you say, boys?"

"It ain't fer me, nor fer Bob, to say what we shall do," replied Bud Morgan; "but if it were fer me to give ther word, it would be fer ter take a hike toward where Ben Tremont is, durn sudden."

"That is just what I would say," said Bob.

"I am sorry," said Ted, "that Ben was obliged to start off alone in the first place. But urgent business here at the ranch made it impossible for more than one of us to get away when the theft of the cattle was first discovered. I hoped that Ben would be able to locate the cattle sooner, and nearer home."

Ted paused, and seemed to be turning the matter over in his mind for some time.

His reverie was interrupted by Bud Morgan:

"Them cattle are durn valuable animals, Ted."

"Yes," replied Ted. "They were the best on the ranch. Blooded stock, and they cannot be replaced at any cost. They were worth a fortune in themselves. We can ill afford to lose them; but there is another consideration which makes me wish to go after the thieves and teach them a lesson. The Los Animas Ranch is a large one. Its acres stretch clear to the banks of the Rio Grande River. It is close to the Mexican line, and this is not the first time that attempts have been made by persons from across the river to run off some of our most valuable stock. This is the first time that cattle thieves have been successful in getting our stock off the ranch and across the river, however. To pass this instance unnoticed would only encourage other would-be thieves to try their hands at it. We must not let this ranch become known as 'easy business.' I now have matters pretty well arranged here at the ranch, and I think we three can easily be spared for a couple of weeks if necessary. We will start at once to join Ben Tremont. Be ready to start early in the morning."

"Yer bet we will," exclaimed Bud Morgan.

Then the three fell to talking of their plans.

Nearly a week before the day that Ted had received the message from Ben Tremont, one of Ted's cowboys had suddenly appeared at the ranch house with the information that a bunch of about thirty cattle, mostly young heifers, blooded stock which were being raised to sell at fancy prices for breeding purposes, had been rounded up by unknown thieves the previous night and run off the ranch.

Ted had been troubled by attempted thefts of cattle before.

He hastily started an investigation, and it was found that the cattle now missing had been taken across the river into old Mexico.

Ted was pressed with important business at the ranch. Every man he had was needed. He could hardly determine to spare even one man, but it was at last decided to let Ben Tremont start on the trail of the stolen cattle.

Ted's parting injunction to Ben had been:

"Find out where the cattle have been taken, if you can, old boy, but don't take any desperate chances. Let the cattle go rather than take any risks. When you find them send us word as quickly as possible; then, if we can get away, Bud and myself and possibly one or two others will come to your assistance."

In Ben's letter the reader has seen the results of Ben's search.

Bright and early the next morning, well armed and well mounted, and dressed in their accustomed khakai-cloth uniforms, Ted Strong, Bud Morgan and Bob Martin forded the Rio Grande River, and were soon galloping along toward the small town of Coro, in old Mexico, where they expected to join Ben Tremont.

They little dreamed of the thrilling experiences they were to encounter before they once more returned to the Los Animas Ranch.

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE BEQUEST.

It was some time after the death of the Mexican, in the ward of the Grand Rapids hospital, before Max Morton thought to examine the contents of the shabby, leathern pocketbook which had been placed in his hands by the dying foreigner.

His thoughts had been straying in other directions. He was thinking of his hard luck in thus being laid up in the hospital for several days. He wondered if the news-

paper would be apt to "dock" him for the time he was absent from duty. He wondered how much his hospital bill would be, and he was reflecting that he could ill afford these additional expenses.

But Morton's disposition was a bright, cheerful one. He did not long give his mind up to these somber thoughts. He chased them away, and tried to steer his thoughts into other channels.

Then it was that he remembered the gift of the dying Mexican.

He recalled the man's last, faltering words: "Get the treasure!"

What treasure?

Perhaps there would be something in the pocketbook, some paper or map, which would explain it.

With trembling fingers, Max opened the pocketbook. He found it crammed full of folded slips of paper.

One after another he laid them out upon a table and opened them.

But although each slip was written upon, Max could not read a word. The writing was all in some foreign language. The language was either French or Spanish, so Max judged. He was unacquainted with either of those languages.

The papers seemed not at all important. They were only mysterious because written in a foreign language. With a sigh, perhaps of disappointment, Max replaced the papers in the pocketbook and laid it to one side.

"Those letters," he murmured to himself, "may be of interest to Ralph Hobart, if they happen to be written in Spanish. He's been crazy on that language ever since the Spanish-American War, when he first began to study it. I'll save them for him."

The sentence had hardly left Morton's lips when the pleasant-faced nurse, who had been assigned to wait upon him, appeared and asked: "Do you feel strong enough to receive a caller?"

Max looked up eagerly. He welcomed a caller. It would help to dispel his gloomy thoughts.

"Yes," he replied. "Who is it?"

"Ralph Hobart," was the reply.

"Please show him up quickly," said Max.

A few moments later, the two boys were clasping hands and greeting each other.

Ralph Hobart was a youth of about the same age as Max, possibly a year or so older. He was not as tall as the young reporter, being more stoutly built.

But Hobart had the same pleasant countenance as his friend. His eyes, like Morton's, were dark brown, and his hair was dark.

It should be explained that the boys had been fast friends for several years. They roomed together, and were never apart except during the hours when Max was on duty.

While Max was compelled to work for his livelihood, Hobart was a young man of leisure. His father and mother, both dead, had left him a large sum of money.

The money was well invested, and Hobart had no inclination to engage in business. He was exemplary in his habits, and lived comfortably on the interest from his inheritance.

He was a great lover of good books, and did much reading and studying. At the time of which this story is written, he was taking a special course of study in a private school in Grand Rapids.

A year or so before, Hobart had become greatly interested in the Spanish language, and had studied it assiduously until he had mastered it. He could read, write, and speak the language fluently.

As Hobart approached the invalid chair in which his young friend was seated, there was an expression of great solicitude upon his face.

"Poor Max," he exclaimed; "I am so sorry you were hurt. Hope it isn't anything very serious, but the doctors have told me that you will soon be up and about again."

Max told his friend all about his dreadful experience, and about the death of the Mexican.

"By the way, Ralph," concluded Max, "the leathern pocketbook, which was given to me by the dying man, is full of letters or notes written in Spanish. I would not wonder if you would enjoy translating them. I am not quite certain, however, whether they are Spanish or French. You will be able to tell when you see them."

Hobart's eyes were shining wth interest as he replied: "Where is the pocketbook? May I see it now?"

"Certainly," replied Max, producing the article and holding it toward his friend.

With eager fingers Hobart opened it and began taking out the letters.

Several of the shorter notes he glanced at hurriedly, laying them quickly to one side.

"They do not seem to contain any information of importance," he said, a disappointed expression covering his face.

Then he picked up one of the longer sheets of paper, which was closely written on one side.

His eyes followed the lines rapidly, and Max, who was closely watching him, saw the look of disappointment vanish and an expression of great interest take its place.

Hobart's hands were trembling with great excitement as he read. Then he suddenly looked up.

"Did the dying Mexican tell you to keep this pocketbook and the contents?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Max, "and the man's last words were, 'Get the treasure!'"

"Get the treasure?"

"Those were his words," said Max.

"Good for you, old boy!" exclaimed Hobart.

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Morton.

"I mean that this document, given to you by the dying Mexican, may prove very valuable to you. You may become a rich man—so rich that your wealth cannot be reckoned. This paper is a valuable bequest."

"Can you read it?" asked Morton, excitedly.

"It is written in pure Spanish," was Hobart's reply.

CHAPTER V.

THE SPANISH LETTER.

Ralph Hobart's words concerning the letter which he held in his hands had whetted the curiosity of the young reporter.

Through Morton's mind flashed the death scene of the dying Mexican and the incidents surrounding it. Over and over in his mind he heard the last words of the Mexican: "Get the treasure!"

Max was certain that the letter now in the hands of his friend explained what treasure the Mexican had meant. He was waiting impatiently for Hobart to read the letter, translated into English.

He had but a moment to wait, for Ralph seemed as anxious to give the information as his friend was impatient to receive it.

Smoothing the letter out carefully, Hobart began translating the epistle slowly into English, as follows:

"To the Person whom I Shall Deem Worthy to Receive this Letter: Let it be known to you that every statement herein written by me is the exact truth. To me, and to me alone, is known the hiding place of a great amount of treasure, and to you, to you only, do I herewith reveal its hiding place, hoping that you will profit by the information, find the treasure, and make it your own. The treasure was accidentally discovered by me in the year 1902, when lost in the mountains of Coahuila, in my native country. I call it the treasure of Obigia, for the reason that Obigia, an ancient chief of the Aztecs of Mexico, was the person who hid this great treasure where it was found by me.

"For years and years, since my earliest recollections, I had heard stories of mysteriously hidden wealth, supposed to have been secreted by this man, Obigia, somewhere in the Oajaca Valley, in the mountains of Coahuila, not far from the village of Coro.

"Numberless hunting parties have been organized to search for the treasure, but in vain. The story was regarded as a myth by my people, but I accidentally stumbled upon its hiding place.

"You will, perhaps, think it strange that I did not appropriate this wealth for myself. I would have done so, except for strange circumstances. I was madly in love with a certain señorita of great beauty. I had a rival, who won from me the girl's affections—a man of wealth, of influence, and power. Mad with jealousy one day, I killed him. Then I fled for my life. I have never returned to my native soil. I have not dared to even venture back to search for the treasure of Obigia.

"I have written this letter to use in case of sudden emergency. I will keep it to place in the hands of the one whom I deem most worthy before I di[illegible]

(Signed.) "Sen[illegible]."

When Hobart had finished reading the letter, Morton looked up with a rather disappointed expression.

"The letter is indeed of great interest," he said, "but it does not seem to tell the secret of where the treasure of Obigia is hidden."

"No, you are right," answered Hobart, "but there is more to it. A line at the bottom of this letter, under the signature, reads:

"'Follow directions on other page in every detail.'"

"But where is the other page?" asked Morton.

Hobart did not reply immediately. He was searching through the others papers taken from the pocketbook.

At last he uttered a joyful exclamation. He had discovered the paper which he sought. He read as follows:

"Directions For Finding the Treasure of Obigia: "From Eagle's Nest Rock look to the east with a spyglass directly through the V-shaped slit. Mark well the blazed cross. Cut the string which holds the iron ball. From the spot where the ball strikes the earth, take seven paces to the southwest. The treasure of Obigia lies hidden in the wall of rock in a secret niche behind the loose stone."

Both of the boys had puzzled expressions upon their faces when Hobart had finished reading the above directions.

"Not very definite directions, I should say," said Morton, who was the first to speak.

"Nevetheless, I think they can be carried out in time," returned Hobart, after a few minutes of deep thought.

"Perhaps, some time," said Morton, seemingly disinterested.

Hobart looked up quickly at his companion, noting the disinterested tone.

"By all means," he said, "I would advise you to start immediately for Mexico, as soon as you are able to travel. You have a great chance to procure a fortune, no telling how valuable. It is a chance well worth taking."

In answer Morton slowly shook his head.

"Why, old boy, you don't seem one particle enthusiastic!" exclaimed Hobart.

"We do not know that the information in that letter is authentic. If the treasure was there originally, it may be gone now. Some one else may have discovered and removed it before now."

"But there is every probability that it has not yet been found. Have not many parties organized to search for it been unable to find it?"

"So says the letter," replied Hobart, "but it is a chance that I cannot take. It is a trip which I cannot afford to take on an uncertainty."

"Ah!" suddenly exclaimed Hobart. A light was breaking in upon his mind.

"I know, Max, old boy, why you hesitate—why you are so apparently disinterested in this matter. It is because

you have not the money to spend. You feel that it is your duty to continue your present work."

Morton did not reply. In fact, Hobart gave him little time to frame an answer had he wished.

"Morton, I am going to insist that you go to Mexico and search for this mysterious treasure. I cannot rest until this matter is sifted. I am already crazy for the adventure, for the trip. I am going with you to look for the treasure of Obigia, and I am going to pay the expenses."

"But I cannot——"

"Shut up!" exclaimed Hobart, effectually interrupting Morton's attempt to decline the generous offer.

"If we find the treasure, then you must promise to let it be divided equally between us," said Morton, a new light, the light of interest, creeping into his eyes.

"We can decide that question after we have found the treasure and taken an invoice of its value," replied Hobart, evasively. "Your first duty now is to send word to your city editor not to expect you back to work in the capacity of reporter."

"But I must work a week or two longer," protested Morton. "I must pay my doctors' bills, and the hospital fees."

"Bosh!" was Hobart's short but entirely adequate reply.

CHAPTER VI.

A TRAITOR GUIDE.

"Here, Miguel, may be a job to your liking. The señors want a guide. You know well the mountains of Coahuila."

The scene was in a small, adobe eating and lodging house in the small burg of Socorro, forty miles from Coro, Mexico.

The proprietor had spoken the opening words of this chapter to an individual sitting on the shady, low porch of the hotel, who was engaged in lazily rolling a cigarette.

The man designated as Miguel finished rolling the cigarette, lighted it, and took several deep inhales from it before giving any evidence of having heard the words addressed to him. Then he arose, and entered the room where the proprietor of the hotel was conversing with two handsome, young Americans.

As the reader may have guessed, the two American youths were none others than Ralph Hobart and Max Morton, with whom we parted in the hospital in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Hobart had induced Morton to accept his offer to finance an expedition to search for the treasure of Obigia, and they had gotten this far upon their journey—as far as they could get by railway.

They had arrived in Socorro that morning, had eaten their dinners at the hotel, and had just asked the proprietor of the hotel where they could obtain the services of a guide who knew the country well.

This had led to the calling in of the man addressed as Miguel.

Miguel did not impress either of the young men as exactly suited for the duties required by them.

The man was a typical Mexican, and was clad in the gaudy clothes of a *vaquero*. Bright colors prevailed, although the pantaloons, loose at the bottom and split at the sides to the knees, and the fanciful sash, bore evidences of much wear and hard use.

He had the swarthy complexion, the dark hair, and the small, black eyes of his race.

His face, while regular and clean-cut, wore an expression of lazy craftiness, and his piercing eyes, shifting continually, gave token of deceitfulness.

But the man was introduced to our two young friends, and was highly recommended by the hotel proprietor as just the man for their business.

To the surprise of the young Americans, it was found that Miguel could talk good English. This was explained when he told them that he had been employed for several years as a cowboy in Texas and New Mexico.

After some questioning and some consultation together, the two boys struck a bargain with Miguel for his services as guide.

They had asked him if he could take them to the Oajaca Valley, and he had answered in the affirmative. Their first order after hiring the man was to assign him the task of procuring for them suitable saddle horses.

They had decided to start upon their overland journey early the following morning.

Of course, they had given the man no hint regarding the object of their visit to the mountain country of Mexico.

They had hired him with the understanding that his services would cease immediately after he had guided them safely to the valley. After once locating the spot known as Eagle's Nest Rock, they planned to dismiss Miguel and continue their researches alone.

They figured that, after being guided to the place, they would have no difficulty in finding their own way back.

They had made elaborate preparations for the trip, having supplied themselves with rifles, revolvers, hunting knives, and suitable clothing for mountain wear.

Miguel's first work for his new employers met with their heartiest commendation, for, before nightfall, he brought for their inspection two admirable-looking speciments of horseflesh which he had bargained for at their directon.

The owners of the animals came with Miguel, and the horses were soon paid for and turned over to our two young friends. Miguel had a horse of his own, so he had stated.

The new guide was on hand early in the morning fully

equipped for the trip, and, after an early breakfast, the party started on the fifty-mile journey through the mountains toward the Oajaca Valley, where the two boys hoped to find the treasure of Obigia.

While not a long journey it was a slow and tiresome one, and the route which it was necessary to follow to reach the objective point made the actual distance much longer.

Much of the way led through winding valleys, bordered by the high, rocky mountain ranges, and along perilous ledges, up and down. There were but few places where the party could proceed much faster than a walk.

Miguel had informed his employers that the trip would take the greater part of three days to make.

The first and second day of the journey passed uneventfully, except that their progress was slower than they had expected.

They did not, however, suspect that Miguel had purposely guided them considerably out of their way to lengthen the journey and consume more time than was necessary to reach the town of Coro, which was on their direct route toward the Oajaca Valley.

The first instance of any kind which caused either of them to suspect that Miguel was not exactly "on the square" happened during the third night of their camping out in the mountains.

During the previous two nights in the mountains they had divided the night into three watches, each of the party remaining awake and on guard for a certain interval of time while the others slept.

On this third night Max and Ralph had served the first two intervals, and Ralph, who was the last to retire, had wakened Miguel for his turn on watch.

Tired and nervous from the unusual exertions of the previous three days' ride, Hobart rolled himself in his blankets with the expectation of going immediately to sleep.

But he found himself unable to court the much desired and needed sleep.

He had lain quietly for nearly half an hour when he suddenly heard what seemed to him to be the wild hoot of a night owl, coming from the dense forest to the right of the camp.

At the same moment he saw Miguel start toward the woods, as if in search of dry sticks for the fire.

But Miguel did not immediately return!

Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed, and still the Mexican remained in the shadows of the forest.

Then wondering what could be keeping the man, Hobart threw aside his blanket and got up to investigate.

The first thing which caught his eyes was an envelope lying not far from the fire and near the saddlebags, which had been taken from his own horse that evening.

The envelope was one which he knew had been placed with other papers in his saddlebag.

He knew that neither Max nor himself had removed the envelope.

A sudden suspicion entered his mind.

The envelope had been removed by Miguel. The man had been examining the private papers in the saddlebags, and had in returning them overlooked this particular envelope.

As the suspicion came into his mind, another startling thought occurred to Hobart.

If the man had examined the papers, he must assuredly have come across the letter of the Mexican who had died in the hospital at Grand Rapids—the letter telling of the location of the treasure of Obigia.

But——

Although Miguel might have discovered and read the letter, he had not found the note giving directions for finding the secret hiding place of the treasure.

That was a relieving thought. Hobart had not been so careless with the more important paper. That paper, the one of directions, he had taken the precaution to have sewn inside of the lining of his buckskin waistcoat.

Hastily Hobart started toward the saddlebag and examined the contents.

Rapidly he sorted out the papers to see if the letter was still among them.

The letter was missing.

Hobart thought quickly for several moments. He was planning what course to pursue. Should he openly accuse Miguel of stealing the letter when the man returned?

No. Hobart decided to be absolutely certain that Miguel had taken the letter before accusing him of its theft.

He decided to roll up in his blanket again and feign sleep.

Then he would watch the movements of the Mexican guide upon his return.

It was nearly half an hour before Miguel again appeared in camp.

The Mexican threw a few sticks of wood upon the fire, and then approached the sleeping youths.

He leaned over and gazed searchingly into their faces. Hobart, although awake, pretended to be fast asleep, and his regular, heavy breathing evidently deceived the Mexican.

That Max was fast asleep there was no doubt, for he was snoring loudly.

As the Mexican retreated toward the fire, Hobart raised his head slightly and watched his movements.

He saw Miguel approach the saddlebags, open them, and slip a folded piece of paper among the bunch of letters and other documents already in the receptacle.

Hobart was now certain that Miguel had had the Spanish letter in his possession, and was now returning it to the place from which he had stolen it.

But what did all this signify?

What had kept the Mexican so long in the woods?

Had Ralph Hobart known that Miguel had entered the woods in answer to a signal—the seeming hoot of a night owl—and that in the forest he had met a mysterious individual to whom he had shown the Spanish letter, Hobart would probably have been much more alarmed than under the present circumstances.

But he could not know that the person whom Miguel had met in the forest had made an exact copy of the Spanish letter, and that from that person Miguel had received some directions which, if carried out, boded ill for the future progress of the two young American treasure seekers.

The person whom Miguel had met in answer to the owl signal was a girl!

CHAPTER VII.

AN ATTEMPTED HOLD UP.

Sleep did not again that night visit the eyes of Ralph Hobart.

His mind was full of thoughts concerning the traitorous act of the guide Miguel.

He was endeavoring to think of some possible way the villain could hope to profit by reading the letter.

Why had the man taken the letter into the forest?

Why had he returned it to the saddlebags at all, after once getting possession of it?

These were puzzling questions, and Ralph could find no answers for them.

He finally decided to say nothing to Miguel concerning his mysterious actions during the night. He would keep the man in ignorance that his acts had been discovered. He would watch the man carefully from then on.

And Hobart also determined not to trouble the mind of his young companion with the knowledge of the mysterious acts of their traitor guide.

Miguel, he reflected, might have been prompted to go through the papers in the saddlebags merely from curiosity.

Perhaps he had discovered the letter and had taken it out to read it at his leisure, thinking it contained more information than it really did contain.

Or, perhaps the man had been unable to read the letter at all.

Nothing might come of his having read the letter, if he had read it, anyway.

And so Hobart resolved to keep the knowledge of the affair to himself until later.

At daybreak Miguel aroused his young employers.

Hobart made a pretense of having been awakened from a sound slumber.

As he rubbed his eyes and stretched his limbs, he asked of Miguel:

"How far to Coro?"

"About ten American miles," was the reply.

"And how long will it take us to reach there?"

"Until about midday," answered Miguel.

The two young men had found their guide to be a man of few words. He could ride silently ahead of the two Americans for miles without volunteering a word unless addressed. When he spoke he used good English, and he seemed to understand perfectly every word of the conversations of the two lads.

At some of the witty remarks of one or the other, his eyes would often sparkle with appreciation, and on several occasions Hobart and Max had noticed smiles upon the man's lips.

But he never took part in the conversations.

Now after answering Hobart's two questions, Miguel began silently the work of preparing a breakfast.

This was soon finished, and shortly after sunrise the three had started to resume their journey toward Coro.

They had proceeded along an unusually perilous trail, following a narrow mountain ledge along which they had been riding single file, when, turning shortly to the left around a jutting rock, they found themselves entering a narrow canyon, just about wide enough for two to ride abreast.

The trail through this canyon was winding.

They were traveling slowly along when suddenly, from behind rocks on either side of the trail, there sprang five men and a girl.

"Halt! Up with your hands, my pretty *Americanos!*"

The girl had shouted the commands.

The two young Americans glanced up with scared countenances.

Every man in the attacking party had a weapon leveled toward the two young Americans. The girl held a brace of revolvers, and she had climbed to a commanding position upon a large rock. She was looking down upon the two lads.

It was a startling and unexpected hold up.

Two of the men were dressed in the fanciful Mexican clothes of *vaqueros*, two in semi-Mexican garbs, and the fifth, who was undoubtedly an American, was dressed like an ordinary cowboy from "the States."

But the girl was the most picturesque member of the hold-up party. She was tall and slim, with a good figure. Her swarthy, handsome, Mexican face was alive with emotions. Her black eyes were sparkling with excitement. Her long, black hair hung loosely down her back.

She was richly dressed, wearing a short, embroidered skirt of a rich, red color, and a sash of blue. Over a beaded, buckskin blouse she wore a tight-fitting velvet jacket, and a Mexican sombrero was tilted jauntily on the back of her head.

It was plain to be seen that she was the leader of the men who were now holding up the two Americans.

As the startling commands from the lips of the girl

rang out, Hobart and Morton at once reined in their horses.

At the moment that the five men and the girl appeared in sight, their traitor guide, Miguel, suddenly halted his horse, jumped from the saddle, and turned and faced the two Americans with a revolver in his hand.

He also was covering the Americans.

It was now plain to the Americans that the hold up had been premeditated. They knew that Miguel had led them into the trap.

But what could now be done?

They knew by the wicked looks upon the faces of their enemies that the hold up was not a practical joke by any means. The men meant business.

The only course to pursue with safety seemed to be to immediately comply with the commands of the girl.

Max and Ralph raised their hands high heavenward.

"Ah, you do well, señors, not to resist," the girl exclaimed. "Anita and her men are all good shots. We shoot to kill. Now get off your horses!"

The young men obeyed.

"May I ask the meaning of this hold up?" asked Hobart.

"Yes," replied the girl leader of the desperadoes. "You have in your possession a paper which we are bound that you shall turn over to us. We do not intend to take your lives, if the paper is produced without trouble. Otherwise we will shoot you to the ground like pigs."

"The paper is—what?" asked Hobart, sparring for time.

"The directions for finding the hiding place of the treasure of Obigia!" was the girl's startling answer.

"But has not your man, Miguel, our traitor guide, made a thorough search for the paper?" asked Ralph. "Has he not discovered that the paper is not among our possessions?"

"It is true he has faithfully searched for the paper without finding it, but we know that it is hidden somewhere about the person of yourself or your friend. If you want to live, you must produce it. See how well I can shoot!"

As Anita spoke she suddenly raised her revolver and fired point-blank toward Hobart.

Her bullet pierced the rim of his sombrero!

Hobart's face turned pale with fright, as he noted the close call he had had.

A ringing, scornful laugh escaped from the lips of the cruel, but beautiful, girl.

"Ah, you tremble! Had I meant to kill you with that shot, you would now be dead! I never miss. Now, señor, hurry up and produce that paper! I will give you two minutes to do so. Then, if the paper is not forthcoming, you die!"

It was a terrible situation that the young Americans found themselves in.

Must they give up the valuable paper, after traveling so far to look for the treasure of Obigia?

It seemed that they had but one choice.

Still Hobart hesitated.

Suddenly the girl fiend spoke again:

"Your time is half gone, señors. Quick, the paper, or die!"

The attentions of the girl and her six followers were all leveled upon our two friends, and just at this minute they were startled by hearing a cool voice from above their heads suddenly announce:

"This game has gone far enough, young woman! Drop your guns and run for your lives!"

The two Americans and the desperadoes all involuntarily glanced upward, toward the direction from which the new voice had seemed to come.

Standing upon a narrow ledge of rocks above them were three men, each of whom held a leveled rifle toward the crowd that had held up Ralph and Max.

The three men were Americans, and each had a determined expression upon his face.

It was plain to be seen that Anita and her followers were now in a dangerous position. The tables had been turned.

With several quickly uttered commands to her followers, the girl jumped from the big rock and started on a run up the canyon, followed by her friends, leaving the two Americans standing by the sides of their horses, uninjured.

The three men who had rescued our two friends were now climbing down the mountain side from the ledge of rocks, and were soon standing before our friends.

"How can we ever repay you, gentlemen, for the service you have rendered us?" asked Hobart.

"Forget it as quickly as possible," answered the handsome young man, who was evidently the leader of the three.

"We had the villains off their guard. It were dead open and shet, but I reckon thet it were a durn good thing fer you fellers that Ted Strong an' Bob an' me happened ter be here jest at ther right time."

It was Bud Morgan who spoke.

Ralph and Max had been rescued from the perilous situation by none others than the young rough rider and his two friends.

The three were on their way to join Ben Tremont at Coro.

CHAPTER VIII.

TED AND BUD TRAPPED.

"You don't mean to say that you are Ted Strong, the famous young rough rider of the Los Animas Ranch, Texas?" asked Ralph Hobart, eagerly, as he stepped forward with outstretched hand toward Ted Strong.

"Yes," replied Ted. "You have guessed it, but I have yet to learn your name and the name of your companion."

The Easterners soon gave the young rough rider their names.

Hobart had read and heard a great deal concerning Ted Strong and the company of rough riders. Ted's fame had spread eastward.

"Your presence here at this time, Mr. Strong, is indeed fortunate for us," said Morton.

"How did you come to get into the trouble?" asked Ted.

Then, without the least hesitation, Hobart told the young rough rider and his two companions all about the object of their having come to Mexico, the Spanish letter and the description of how to find the treasure of Obigia. He told about the treachery of the guide, Miguel.

Ted listened with interest to the story and then he told the two boys of the object of his own trip to Mexico.

"We also were heading for Coro, where we expect to meet our friend, Ben Tremont, but lost our way and were looking for the right trail when we heard the girl's shot. We crept over the edge of a cliff and found our selves on a narrow ledge right above you."

"Do you now know the right way to reach Coro?" asked Hobart.

"No. We are not quite certain. I am sure, however, that your guide was misleading you when he turned into this canyon. It is just possible that further along the canyon, however, there may be a branching trail leading toward the town. Our horses are on the other side of the ledge of rocks. If you two will assist Bob Martin in bringing the animals around into this trail, Bud and I will foot it along down the canyon for a mile or so to investigate. You can wait for us here. We will not be gone over an hour or two."

Ted's proposition met with the favor of the two Easterners. They readily assented to assist Bob Martin in getting the horses around the ledge and into the canyon trail.

The desperadoes had retreated, and they felt no immediate danger of being again attacked at once.

Ted and Bud started off at once on their trip of investigation.

The two horses ridden by Ralph and Max were tied in a clump of nearby bushes, and then the two boys started off with Bob Martin to procure the three horses belonging to the rough riders.

Bud and Ted took a direction up the canyon, the same in which the desperadoes had followed their girl leader.

For three-quarters of a mile Ted and his companion trudged along without finding any opening in either wall of the mountain through which a branching trail could lead.

They were hoping to find a break in the mountain to the south in the direction in which they knew the town of Coro was situated.

They had traveled nearly three miles from where they had left Bob, Ralph and Max, when they came to where there appeared a narrow slit in the face of the rocks to the north.

Signs showed that horsemen had passed through the slit many times.

Although the opening was in the opposite direction from which they wished to travel, the two rough riders concluded to explore the opening for a short distance.

The slit in the face of the mountain was hardly wider than an ordinary-sized door. It reached from the top of the ridge to the bottom of the canyon and the two sides of the slit were as straight and as clean cut as if the slit had been made by a giant cleaver.

The two rough riders stepped into the slit and had proceeded along for a couple of rods when their ears caught the sound of a sliding, rattling, scraping noise in their rear, followed by a jar and thud.

They looked quickly around and were amazed to see that a large, smooth slab of rock now barred the mouth of the slit or passage where they had entered the gulch.

The slab of rock had evidently fallen from above.

Ted hurried to investigate. The discovery which he made was an alarming one. He had found that his companion and himself had really walked into a clever trap.

The slab of rock had not fallen by accident.

Human hands had been responsible for the blocking up of the passage!

Ted saw that the huge slab of rock had been shaped by tools in the hands of skilled workmen and at great pains.

It had been so placed that it fitted into roughly hewn grooves at either side of the passage. It could not be moved either outward or inward. It had been made to work up and down in the grooves.

The slab of rock, when the rough riders entered the passage, was far above them. It had been dropped as soon as they had entered.

Ted was certain that himself and companion had been seen when they entered the passage, that, even now, unseen eyes were watching their every movement.

His suspicion was, of course, that they had been trapped in the narrow mountain passage by the men and the girl who had, an hour or so before, held up the two young Easterners.

And he was not mistaken.

After discovering that there was no possible way to get back into the canyon, Bud and Ted turned and hurried along in the direction they had been taking when first alarmed by the noise of the falling slab.

They had taken their revolvers in their hands prepared for instant action, and were determined to fight their foes to the death if necessary.

They had advanced but a few rods along the narrow

passage when they discovered that the slit came to a sudden end.

There was no outlet in that direction.

They gazed up at the face of the rocks.

On one side smooth and perfectly precipitous walls were in view, but on the other side, far up the mountain, they could see a narrow ledge of rocks all along the wall of the mountain, with jutting corners and peaks.

Whether it would be possible to reach that ledge, or, if they should be able to climb to it, whether they could climb still further, they could not tell.

They could only determine by trying.

They retreated back down the passage toward the canyon and, rounding a short turn, found a place where it seemed just possible that they might reach the ledge.

But it was a long and tedious climb. It was the middle of the afternoon before Ted finally pulled himself up from a dangerous peak of rock to the narrow floor of the ledge and turned and assisted Bud Morgan to reach his side.

The two rough riders sat down and rested for several moments before continuing their exertions.

Then they walked the rocky shelf in search of a suitable place for beginning the rest of their climb.

They passed around the short turn previously spoken of, when they suddenly came to the opening of a shallow cave in the face of the mountain.

They knew that the cave was not deep, for they could see most of the back wall of the opening, but there was one corner where the shadows lurked and the two rough riders walked into the cave, hoping that in this corner was a passage leading through the mountain and perhaps back to the canyon.

They had hardly gotten into the cave when they heard a rustle of footsteps behind them.

They turned quickly and found themselves gazing into the barrels of eight revolvers held by the beautiful girl desperado and four of her followers.

The villains were stretched out across the entrance to the cave.

While climbing, the rough riders had been obliged to replace their revolvers in their belts. They had not drawn them since.

The desperadoes certainly had "the drop" on our two friends.

"Hold up your hands!" was the short, sharp order of the girl.

Ted and Bud were too wise to resist.

They knew that to disobey the girl's command meant death.

They complied.

They were in the hands of their enemies!

CHAPTER IX.

FACE TO FACE WITH DEATH.

By the directions of Anita, the girl outlaw, two of her men produced lariats and ropes and tied the two rough riders, hand and foot.

Then, to make doubly certain, the girl directed that the long lariats be wound about their bodies, around and around, from the shoulders to the ankles.

When the Mexicans were through with this work, Ted and Bud were perfectly helpless. They could not move an inch in any direction.

Anita stood a little distance away and gazed upon her helpless prisoners. Then she spoke:

"Ah, how I hate you! You are pigs!"

"And why should you hate us?" asked Ted, coolly.

"Why should I not hate you? Did you not come to this country to search for the great treasure of Obigia? Is it not right that we, the sons and daughters of this country, should hav that treasure, rather than you *Americano* dogs?"

"But I am not searching for the treasure," replied Ted. "I know nothing about it. Where is it?"

"Liars! Do you hope to lead me astray? Has not my faithful man, Miguel, read your letter? Now, we want the directions for finding that treasure. We have searched in vain many months for it. We know that you have the secret. You must tell it to us, or pay a penalty."

"And what may be the penalty?"

"Death! A horrible death!"

It was plain to be seen that the girl had formed an idea that Ted and Bud were friends of the two young Easterners who had been held up by herself and companions earlier in the day. She believed that the whole party were in search of the treasure.

"I tell you again, whether you believe it or not, that we know nothing of where to find the treasure you speak of," said Ted.

"And I say you lie!" returned the girl.

"You may search us for papers if you wish," said Ted.

"No need to search," said Anita. "You know the secret by heart. You must tell us the directions. Then, we will investigate. If we find the treasure we will release you. If not, we will kill you."

"I do not know the directions you ask for so graciously," replied Ted, again.

"That is your final answer?"

"Yes."

"Señor, I cannot help but admire your spirit, your bravery. There are few men who would face such a fate as awaits you and your friend in order to preserve a secret. I do not like to take the life of such a brave and handsome man as yourself, but I must do so. I have never made an idle threat. Anita, the Queen of the Demons of Coahuila, never makes a promise of death that

she does not keep. Still—— I will give you one more chance, señor, to give me the desired information."

Ted did not reply.

The girl turned to her men and gave them some low, hurried instructions in Spanish. Two of them saluted her and hurried out of the cave.

"Think again, señor. Remember, that if I do not get the information I seek of you, I will not rest until I have captured the rest of your friends. It will be easy, and some one of them will tell the secret to save his life. They will soon be in our power, as now you are in my power. I have just sent two of my men to raise the slab which bars the entrance to this mountain crevice. Soon they will begin to search for you. They will follow your trail into the mountain. Then, presto! I will have them trapped as easily as I succeeded in trapping you and your companion. Come. Will you tell me the secret, or must I kill you?"

Ted knew that he and Bud Morgan were in as tight a fix as they had ever experienced in all their thrilling adventures. But he had not given up hope. He was now thinking fast for some plan of escape, even bound so helplessly as he was.

He did not answer the last remarks and questions of the girl. It was doubtful if he had even heard all that she had said. His brain seemed on fire. He must con coct some plan, and that quickly!

But the situation was altogether too desperate. There seemed to be absolutely no plan that Ted could think of to outwit the girl, to convince her that he knew noth ing of the secret hiding place of the treasure, or to per suade her from her determination to put himself and Bud Morgan to death.

Ted wondered what method the girl was expecting to take to kill himself and Bud Morgan.

Would she shoot them in cold blood?

Would she order her men to fall upon them and stab them with their sharp, gleaming knives?

Would she order that they be hung?

These were questions neither Ted nor Bud had long to speculate upon. On the return of the two men who had gone to raise the stone slab from the entrance to the mountain slit they carried between them a small keg, which Ted knew instantly contained powder.

They brought the keg into the cave and placed it in an upright position right between the two rough riders.

Then, at a word from Anita, all of the men withdrew from the cave and out of sight.

When the men had gone, Anita came closer than before to Ted Strong and looked up into his eyes.

In her own eyes there was a strange expression—an expression which Ted was unable to analyze.

"Señor, you are a brave man. It is really distasteful for me to thus take your life. I wish that you had never crossed my path. Or, rather, I wish that I had first become acquainted with you as a friend. You are handsome. You are brave. You are the only man whom I have ever seen whom I could learn to love!"

Ted's eyes opened wide with astonishment at the girl's startling words.

He looked intently at her. Her eyes were burning with a strange light.

Her bosom was heaving with emotion. Her chin was quivering.

"And a few moments ago you said that you hated me," said Ted.

"Did I say that, señor? Did I say that? No. Yes, I did say it. But, señor, how can those two great ruling passions be recognized from each other? With me, with the warm blood of my ancestors coursing through my veins, it must be either one or the other. I must hate, or I must love. I wished to hate you, for I knew you could not love me. Now I wish to love you. There is no sacrifice I would not make to be certain that you would reciprocate that love. I would be your slave forever."

"Then, if you love me, why not release me?" asked Ted.

"But life would be unbearable with you alive and knowing that my love was valueless to you," replied the girl. She was now on her knees in front of the young rough rider. Her cheeks were aflame with the excitement of her passion.

"Señor," she exclaimed, "I will release you upon one condition. You are a man of honor, and I will take your word that you will bide by your promise once you make it."

"And what is the condition?" asked Ted.

"That you will make me your wife immediately."

Ted was silent. He had half expected this answer. He was wondering if it was his duty to take the girl at her word. For himself he would have accepted death rather than the terrible price demanded by the girl for his life.

But his thought was of Bud Morgan—the great, big-hearted Bud, who had always stood by him through thick and thin. Ted knew that Bud would at any moment be willing to sacrifice his own life to save that of his young "capting," as he often called Ted.

Should he make the sacrifice to save the life of Bud Morgan?

Bud Morgan evidently divined the thought that was passing through the mind of the young rough rider.

"Don't make ther promise, Ted," he said. "It would be wicked. When you marry, it should be to ther only womern yer love. Don't do it, Ted. Let us die together, if we must."

Tears almost came to the eyes of the young rough rider as he realized the depth of Bud Morgan's affection for him. He knew that the old cowboy would rather

accept death than have his friend's happiness for life ruined.

Bud Morgan's words had a quick effect upon the Mexican girl. As she heard his reference to "ther only womern yer love," she jumped quickly to her feet and glanced angrily into the face of Ted Strong.

"So you are already in love?" she asked, passionately.

Ted did not reply. And the girl evidently took his silence for an answer in the affirmative.

"I take back my offer," she almost screamed. "You must die, now, if for no other reason than that I may be sure another woman may never be made happy by becoming your wife!"

The girl was busily engaged as she shrieked these foregoing sentences.

From a concealed pocket in her short skirt she had taken a powder fuse, such as are often used by miners in blasting.

With the point of her hunting knife, she quickly cut a small hole through the powder keg near the bottom and inserted one end of the fuse.

Her purpose was evident. She intended to touch off the keg of powder.

The explosion would be terrible. There was enough powder in the keg to blow off the roof of the cave. It would tear the rough riders limb from limb!

Ted Strong and Bud Morgan were face to face with a horrible death.

There seemed no possible escape.

When she had placed the fuse to her satisfaction, the girl produced a box of matches, selected one, scratched it on the stone floor of the cave and lighted the fuse.

As the Mexican girl fiend lighted the fuse, she exclaimed:

"Señors, señors, pray fast, for time flies. You will die quickly! The treasures of Obigia are not for you. You will never marry the girl you love! Curse her! I hope she will die of a broken heart!"

With these words the girl jumped to her feet and, without one glance toward her victims, she ran quickly from the cave.

The fuse was burning fast.

Within three minutes all but an inch had burned away.

The spark of flame was hissing its way rapidly to the keg of powder. In less than a minute the terrible explosion would come.

With blanched, set faces the two rough riders braced themselves to meet their cruel, horrible fate like real men!

CHAPTER X.

THE SEARCH PARTY.

While Ted Strong and Bud Morgan were engaged in exploring the trail leading into the canyon, from the place where Anita and her men had held up Hobart and Morton, for the purpose of discovering a branch path leading toward the village of Coro, Bob Martin and the two Easterners were climbing over the ledge to the place where the three horses of the rough riders had been left.

Bob Martin, in the excitement of the last few minutes, had become confused. He had lost his bearings, and it was some time before he could locate the clump of bushes where the horses had been tied.

Then, after considerable exploration, it was found that, in order to get the horses around and into the canyon where the hold up had taken place, it would be necessary to make a wide detour.

They would have to travel a distance of five or six miles.

They had occupied considerable time before they at last reached the place where they had been left by Ted and Bud, and where Ted had ordered them to wait for him.

At least three hours had passed.

They had expected to find Ted Strong and Bud Morgan waiting for them when they got back, but, of course, the two rough riders were not there.

For over an hour Bob and his new friends waited for the reappearance of Ted and Bud. Then Bob began to feel uneasy. He feared that his friends had met with trouble of some kind.

Perhaps they had met and been overcome by the villains who had previously attacked Hobart and Morton.

Bob waited impatiently for half an hour longer, and then he announced his intention of starting out in search of the other two rough riders.

"Boys," he said, "I know that they would have been back had not something of a very serious nature detained them. They are in some kind of trouble. The quicker we get to their relief, the better. Do you wish to accompany me, or had you rather stay here?"

Both of the boys expressed their desire to go with Bob. They were not the lads to forsake a friend in trouble, especially such a friend as Ted Strong, who a few hours before had saved them from great peril.

Accordingly, the three were soon riding along up the trail in the direction taken by Ted and Bud several hours before. They were riding three of the horses and leading two behind them.

They proceeded slowly so as not to, by any chance, pass the two missing rough riders on their way.

They had proceeded to a point on the trail opposite to the slit in the north mountain wall. Here Bob called a halt. It was his intention to walk to the entrance to the slit and examine the soil for footprints or other evidences to show that Ted and Bud had gone that way.

He had reached the slit, and was just bending down to examine the soil at closer range, when he suddenly fell flat on his face.

There had come a loud, reverberating explosion.

And it was near by.

The very mountains seemed to tremble. They seemed about to topple over!

The sudden rush of air through the slit, together with the surprise, had caused Bob Martin to fall, but he quickly regained his feet.

He turned his face toward the slit in the mountain.

As the echoes of the great explosion rolled away down the canyon, Bob heard the sounds of excited voices in the narrow passage. Then he heard the sounds of galloping hoofs rapidly approaching.

In another second he caught a glimpse of the riders. The bright-colored Mexican clothes told him in a moment who were the horsemen so rapidly coming down the narrow passage toward the canyon.

His thoughts traveled quickly.

He knew that the desperadoes whom they had met once before that day were bearing down upon him.

He suspected that the explosion had been caused by them.

For what purpose?

Ted and Bud were missing!

Perhaps they had fallen into the hands of these villains!

Perhaps that explosion had sounded their doom! Perhaps both Ted and Bud had been killed! If so, these villains were to blame.

Bob decided to try and capture the scoundrels.

He quickly ran toward his horse, and had regained his saddle and given a few, quick, decisive instructions to Hobart and Morton before the first of the approaching desperadoes issued from the narrow passage into the canyon.

Bob had drawn his party up in a line and, as the first man approached, he raised his weapons and shouted:

"Halt!"

The desperado gave Bob one quick glance. If he noticed that he was being covered by revolvers in the hands of three men, he ignored the fact. Instead of halting, he dug the spurs cruelly into the sides of his horse and started at breakneck speed down the canyon.

The desperado seemed thoroughly scared. Bob's revolver trigger clicked, but no bullet flew toward the man at whom he had aimed. The cartridge had missed fire.

The first desperado was quickly followed by his companions and, before Bob could rotate the chamber of his revolver, they had all passed behind a large bowlder and were out of range.

Then, several rods behind the last man to leave the passage, came the girl rider.

Hobart and Morton each fired a shot toward her, but their bullets went far wide of the mark.

"After the villains, boys!" shouted Bob Martin, putting the spurs to his horse and leading the chase.

He was determined to capture the desperadoes if possible, although he had no definite plan of procedure.

And so the chase commenced down the winding, tortuous, dangerous trail.

Some seconds the desperadoes were in sight, then, for several minutes, they were hidden from the sight of the pursuers by the windings of the canyon.

But it was soon plain that Anita and her men were slowly, but surely, distancing their pursuers. They knew the nature of the trail better than Bob and his friends. In half an hour Bob reined in his horse. He knew that further chase was useless.

As the three paused for a minute or two to let their horses breathe, they suddenly heard the sounds of approaching hoof beats.

Some lone rider was coming toward them down the canyon trail from the direction the desperadoes and their girl leader had gone.

Could one of the villains be coming back?

They would soon know, for the approaching horseman would soon be in sight.

The three young men drew their pistols for ready action if necessary, and waited.

A moment later a joyful shout escaped the lips of Bob Martin:

"Hurrah! It's Ben Tremont!"

It was, indeed, the young, rough-rider giant who was approaching.

CHAPTER XI.

A CLOSE CALL.

Left by the Mexican female fiend in the shallow cave, bound so that they could make not one move for self-protection and left close to a powder keg, with a lighted fuse attached, Ted Strong and Bud Morgan had given up all hope of being saved.

Death was very near. They expected that within a minute they would be blown into eternity.

"Good-by, Bud, old boy," murmured Ted. "I wish I could take your hand."

"Good-by, Ted," answered Bud, with a tremulous voice. "I reckon this is ther last adventure me and you will have together. If yer has ter go, I reckon I'm glad I'm goin' with yer."

The sputtering flame was rapidly eating up the fuse.

Ted Strong's lips were moving in prayer, and Bud noticed it.

"Pray fer me, too, Ted," he said, "yer know I don't know——"

At this point Bud was interrupted.

"Good God, I can't let you die like this! I have come to save you!"

Such was the exclamation of Anita, the Queen of the Coahuila Demons.

There was a wild, terrified look upon her face as she rushed into the cave.

In her hand she held a gleaming knife, and she rushed straight toward the young rough rider and, with one slash, severed his bonds.

Then, without looking toward Bud Morgan, she turned and flew from the cave.

But she dropped the blade upon the floor of the cave as she turned to flee, and she did not stop to pick it up.

With a bound Ted seized the knife, and turned and cut Bud Morgan's bonds.

They were both free.

But they were still far from safe. In a glance Ted saw that scarcely a quarter of an inch remained of the powder fuse!

With a cry to Bud to hurry after him, the young rough rider sprang for the mouth of the cave. Bud was close behind him.

They reached the open air and rushed along the ledge. They had traveled several rods when the explosion occurred.

The noise was deafening. The whole mountain side trembled. The ledge upon which they were standing trembled like a leaf in a gale of wind.

Ted remembered of hearing the sounds of falling and splitting rocks. Then he grew dizzy. He reeled toward the edge of the ledge, and then knew he was falling!

Everything grew dark before his eyes, and he lost consciousness.

Bud's experience was much the same. He, too, grew dizzy and reeled toward the edge of the shelf, but he did not fall over. He was suddenly knocked senseless by being hit upon the head with a falling rock which had been sent high in the air by the explosion.

It was probably an hour later that Bud Morgan finally returned to consciousness. His first realization was of an intense pain in his head.

He placed his hand on the top of his cranium, and found a large swelling. Then he sat up and looked around him. Gradually the remembrance of the explosion returned to him.

Then he thought of Ted. He looked about him. Ted was nowhere in sight. Where could the young rough rider be? Had Ted been killed? If so, where was his body?

Bud gathered all his energy and scrambled to his feet. He was dizzy with the pain in his head, but he was resolved to ascertain the fate of his young friend.

It was clear that Ted was nowhere upon the ledge. He must have fallen over its edge.

As Bud realized this fact, he shuddered and his face turned pale.

If Ted had fallen from the ledge to the bottom of the passage, there was scarcely one chance in a thousand that he had escaped with his life!

But Bud had determined to learn the worst as quickly as possible.

He approached the edge of the rocky shelf and looked down upon the rocks below.

Then he gave a gasp of astonishment.

About twelve feet below the edge of the shelf he saw the limp and inanimate form of Ted Strong, suspended in mid air by the branches of a small, scrubby tree.

It was the only tree or bush of any kind along the whole face of the mountain wall.

It seemed almost miraculous that the young rough rider should have fallen over the edge of the ledge at that particular spot. At any other point his body must surely have been mangled upon the cruel rocks below.

But Ted had been caught by the limbs of this tree.

Bud could not tell whether the young rough rider was dead or merely unconscious. If Ted was unconscious, Bud knew that a sudden awakening might prove disastrous.

Ted's support was, indeed, frail.

His limp body was delicately balanced upon the limbs of the tree and the slightest movement on his part might precipitate him toward the bottom of the passage.

If Ted was not already dead, Bud knew that he must hurry to save him before he should return to consciousness.

Bud shook off the dull, dizzy feeling as best he could, and started back quickly along the ledge toward the cave where the explosion had taken place.

He had formed a plan.

It was to secure the lariats with which Ted and himself had been bound, tie the severed lengths together, and lower the rope thus made to Ted's body.

When Bud reached the place where the cave had been, he discovered a wonderful transformation. The cave no longer existed. The powder had blown away the roof, and where the cave had been, there was now only a great widening of the ledge.

Bushels of loose, broken rocks were heaped about the place where Ted Strong and himself had been standing, securely bound, when Anita had lighted the powder fuse.

The pieces of lariat rope had disappeared, either blown away or covered by the loose rocks.

For several moments Bud searched diligently for some of the rope.

At last he espied the end of a piece of rope protruding from under a pile of loose rocks. He took hold of it, and gave a stout pull. To his delight, he found that it was not so tightly wedged by the rocks that he could not pull it out.

With considerable effort he managed to draw it into plain sight, and then, to his great delight, he found it to be a full-length lariat.

It was not one of the lariats which had been used to bind Ted and himself. It was evidently a lariat which had been brought to the cave for that purpose, but which had not been needed.

Bud hastened back to the point on the ledge directly over the tree which had caught the falling body of Ted Strong. And, as he retraced his steps, Bud made a noose in one end of the lariat.

He knelt upon the rocky shelf and leaned far over its edge.

Then he began to lower toward Ted the noose end of the lariat.

He hoped to be able to work the noose over Ted's head and as far as the young rough rider's waist, but now he saw that his plan would not work.

Ted's head and shoulders were below the level of his feet, and had sunk down into the branches of the tree.

But Bud saw that he could easily noose Ted's feet, which were close together.

Bud took the precaution to tie the loose end of the lariat around a jutting point of rock.

Bud had just succeeded in getting the noose over Ted's feet, and had worked it along as far as Ted's knees when the young rough rider suddenly returned to consciousness.

As Ted opened his eyes, he started to raise his head.

The motion, slight as it was, was sufficient to throw him from his delicate balance upon the limbs of the tree.

There was a creaking of dry limbs, and Ted's body slid off into space!

Bud Morgan gave a great cry of alarm. The noose had not been drawn tight as yet!

But, as he saw Ted's form slipping from the branches, Bud had the presence of mind to give the lariat a quick pull. The noose was drawn tight just as Ted's feet were slipping through it. In fact, one of Ted's feet had already slipped from the noose.

But Bud's quick jerk, just in the nick of time, had tightened the noose about the young rough rider's other ankle.

Ted dropped several feet downward, and was left hanging in the air by one foot.

He had been almost miraculously saved from immediate death.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Bud, fervently, when he saw that Ted had been saved from falling to the rocks below. Ted's friend pulled a cotton handkerchief from his pocket and wiped great beads of perspiration from his face.

It had certainly been a close call for Ted Strong.

Then Bud leaned over the ledge and made an effort to draw up the dangling body of the young rough rider. But his effort was a failure.

Bud was weak from the recent terrible experience he had gone through, followed by the excitement incident to trying to save his friend.

He found that he could not lift Ted's body.

With a groan of disappointment Bud fell back against the rocky wall behind him, but the next instant a joyful shout came from lips.

"Hurry up, fellers. We needs yer help!"

Bud had seen four persons advancing up the passage. They were Bob Martin, Ben Tremont and the two young Easterners.

After meeting Ben Tremont, Bob Martin had told the story of Ted's and Ben's disappearance and of his suspicions.

Ben had not met the retreating desperadoes, but that fact was explained by Ben's statement that he had just entered the canyon trail a few minutes before meeting his friends.

He had come on a direct trail from Coro.

Instead of pursuing the desperadoes, Ben Tremont insisted upon going back to the place where Bob and his friends had heard the explosion, for the purpose of investigating and learning, if possible, what had happened to Ted and Bud.

They arrived just in time to help Bud Morgan draw Ted's dangling form up to the ledge from which he had fallen at the time of the explosion.

CHAPTER XII.

BEN'S STORY.

"We have some hard work ahead of us in regaining possession of those stolen cattle."

It was Ben Tremont who spoke.

Ted Strong had been assisted from his uncomfortable situation and Bud Morgan and himself had nearly recovered from the effects of their terrible adventure.

The four rough riders and their two new friends from the East had left the mountain slit and were gathered before a freshly built fire in the canyon.

It was nearly dark, and they had decided to camp in the canyon for the night.

At this point there was water for the horses, and a small, grassy spot where the animals could feed. The canyon was here much wider than at the place where they had entered it that forenoon.

Now that Ben had joined them, it was unnecessary for them to journey on to Coro.

While engaged in eating their suppers Ted had asked Ben to tell what he knew about the stolen cattle.

"How did you locate the cattle?" Ted asked.

"I followed a blind trail, as you might say," Ben replied, "until I reached Coro. From inquiries along the trail I learned the direction taken by the cattle thieves, and traced them to the vicinity of the little town. The second day after my arrival there, I chanced to hear a conversation between two Mexicans. One was a *vaquero* and the other appeared to be a rich ranchman. The *vaquero* was offering some cattle for sale. From his statement of the number of cattle, and from his description of them, I knew the cattle he was trying to sell were the cattle stolen from the Los Animas Ranch.

"I made a fatal mistake right there by approaching this

vaquero and openly denouncing him as a cattle thief. Of course, that broke up the sale to the ranchman, but it did me more harm than good. The *vaquero* sprang to his feet and ran away. I tried to follow him, but lost him.

"The same day I received a warning note. It was written in a feminine hand, and read: 'You have accused one of my men of cattle stealing. You guessed it right, but, if you try to recover the cattle, your life shall pay the penalty of your temerity. You are hereby warned to leave this country at once. If you are not gone in two days, you will be marked for death.'

"The note was signed: 'Anita, Queen of the Coahuila Demons.'"

"And then?" suggested Ted.

"I made inquiries concerning the Coahuila Demons," replied Ben. 'I learned that the Coahuila Demons were a powerful secret clan of desperadoes who had their stronghold in the mountains surrounding the Oajaca Valley, west of Coro, and that they had terrorized the whole country for months, committing all sorts of depredations. It was said that they had for a leader a Mexican girl– a female fiend.

"I had no trouble getting all sorts of information regarding the exploits of this mysterious gang. They must number thirty or forty. The trouble you have been experiencing was with only a small portion of them."

"But where are the cattle?" asked Ted. "Do you know?"

"Yes," replied Ben. "The cattle are being held somewhere in the Oajaca Valley. I understand this valley is accessible in only one place, through a short, but narrow, canyon. This canyon is continually guarded by some of the desperadoes. If we get the cattle, we must fight our way into the valley."

"And it is in this valley that we must go to secure the treasure of Obigia!" exclaimed Hobart.

Ted looked up with interest in his eyes.

"If that is so," he said, "we had better combine forces. You help us get our cattle, and we will help you find your treasure."

And thus it was settled.

Hobart showed the rough riders the written directions for finding the treasure, and the paper was examined and commented upon.

"The directions seem somewhat vague," said Ted, "but if I were you, I would follow them explicitly. Of course, it is impossible to tell now what is meant by the blazed cross or the iron ball, but you will doubtless learn all about it after you have located the Eagle's Nest Rock, and have taken a look through the spyglass."

"By the way," said Ben Tremont, "I think I can locate that Eagle's Nest Rock for you. It is a strangely shaped, mountain cleft, which I noticed on my way into Coro. I made some inquiries about it, and learned the name which had been given to it."

"How did you come to leave the town to-day, and be away out here in the hills?" asked Ted, suddenly, of Ben Tremont.

"I grew tired of lying around accomplishing nothing," answered the young giant, "and I decided to visit the owner of the mine, whose ore train was robbed by the Coahuila Demons a few days ago. The owner lives near his mine, which is not over six or seven miles from here. We can stop and see him to-morrow morning, if you wish. It will be nearly on the trail we must take to reach the canyon leading to the Oajaca Valley."

Thus the members of the party continued to converse about their plans until quite a late hour. Then it was decided to keep a strict watch all night. They knew not but that Anita, re-enforced by others of her gang, might return to make a night attack upon them. They did not propose to be surprised.

The party was, therefore, divided into watches.

But there were no disturbances of any kind during the whole night.

All were up early in the morning, and hastened their breakfast preparations so as to make an early start toward the mining camp.

But, after breakfast, just before they were in readiness to saddle their horses, Ted announced that he wished to make an examination of the results of the explosion the previous day, which came so near sending Bud Morgan and himself to their deaths.

Ted was accompanied into the mountain slit by all the members of the party.

As Ted passed through the slit, he looked upward and remarked to Ben Tremont, who was by his side: "I am curious to examine that slab of rock which drops down these grooves. It must have been considerable work to shape that rock, and dig out the grooves. It seems hardly probable that Anita's men would have gone to all that trouble without some important reason for it. Of course, the slab was not placed in its present position just for the purpose of trapping Bud Morgan and I."

Before he left the passage, Ted determined to climb up onto the ledge and learn the secret of the mechanism controlling the big slab.

He little dreamed of the important discovery he was to make within a few minutes.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SILVER BULLION.

Ted and his party proceeded at once along the passage to a point opposite to where the great explosion had taken place. Then they paused, and with great interest gazed upon the pile of débris at the foot of the ledge, which had been blown from the side of the mountain.

Tons and tons of loose rocks were heaped up at the bottom of the narrow passage, and from the ledge to the foot of the mountain wall a wide and deep furrow had been torn in the rocks.

Ted walked around the big pile of débris to look at the results of the explosion from the other side. He had hardly passed around the pile of rocks when his companions heard him utter a sudden exclamation of surprise.

Bud, Bob and Ben quickly followed their young leader. As they approached Ted's side, a very unexpected sight met their gaze.

Heaped upon the floor of the passage, promiscuously with rocks and loose earth, they saw many bars and bricks of white meal. It was silver bullion they knew at the first glance.

Ted had moved forward, and had picked up one of the silver bricks. Upon one side were stamped two letters, probably the initials of the owner of the mine from which the metal had come.

"Ben," said Ted, "I believe we have made a valuable discovery. This is probably the bullion which the Coahuila Demons stole from the ore wagons that you were telling us about."

Ben had now picked up one of the bricks, and was examining the stamp.

"There is little doubt but that you are right," replied Ben, "for these initials, 'F. V.,' must certainly stand for Fernando Vigil, the owner of the mine from which the stolen ore was taken. I did not know, however, that the ore had been refined and run into bricks and bars."

"Ben," said Ted, suddenly, "do you know the way to Vigil's mine?"

"Yes."

"Then we will postpone our start for the Oajaca Valley. If the desperadoes left this silver here, they will certainly return for it before long. While you ride to the mine and notify the owner that his silver has been found, the rest of us will remain here to guard it. Do not be gone longer than necessary, and bring back men and wagons to carry the silver away."

Five minutes later Ben was mounted and riding away to carry out Ted's instructions.

After Ben had started, Ted and the rest of the party began taking the silver bars and bricks and piling them together in a big pile.

During this work Ted discovered that the silver bullion had originally been secreted in a sort of pocket in the wall of the mountain, near the bottom of the passage.

The falling rocks coming from above, at the instance of the explosion, had laid open this pocket, and considerable of the bullion bars and bricks had become scattered over the floor of the passage. Undoubtedly the desperadoes, who had been in the passage at the time of the explosion, had made their quick retreat before discovering that their ill-gotten gains had been uncovered.

Ted and his companions had a long wait for Ben Tremont's return, but they kept an alert lookout for their foes, and were ready at any minute to give the desperadoes a warm reception should they show up.

But Anita and her gang did not return.

It was about the middle of the afternoon when Ben Tremont, accompanied by Fernando Vigil, the owner of the bullion, and four men appeared.

They had brought with them three heavy wagons for the purpose of removing the bullion to a safer place.

Fernando Vigil was overjoyed at the discovery of the hiding place of his silver. He had given up all hope of ever recovering it. He identified it quickly as the silver which had been stolen, but he said that the pile Ted and his companions had made of the bullion did not represent quite all that had been stolen from his train.

However, he was deeply indebted, he said, to Ted and the rest of the young rough rider's party for the recovery of this much.

While Vigil's men were carrying the silver out of the passage and loading it into the wagons, Ted and his party searched the mountain passage to see if they could find the rest of the stolen bullion. But they were not successful.

It was finally concluded that the desperadoes, who had stolen the silver in the first place, had disposed of part of it—that they had turned it into money.

When the wagons were loaded, Fernando was pressing in his invitation for the rough riders, Ralph and Walter included, to accompany him to his mine to pass the night.

Ted accepted the invitation for his party. The mine

was directly in the direction they must journey to reach the mountain valley where the stolen cattle were being held. Besides, Ted felt that the whole party should guard the wagons, filled with the valuable bullion, back to the mines.

No telling where Anita and her followers might be. The wagons might be attacked by the desperadoes in an endeavor to regain possession of the ore.

It was after dark when the party reached the Vigil Mine.

The had seen nothing of the desperadoes during the journey.

After a late supper, Ted and his friends went almost immediately to bed, but they were up bright and early in the morning and ready to take up the arduous duties that they knew were before them.

They fully expected to have a hard struggle to regain possession of the cattle.

And they might meet with great opposition in searching for the treasure of Obigia.

Ted Strong had told Fernando of the object of himself and the other rough riders in coming to Mexico. He had told the man about the stolen cattle, and where they suspected the cattle were hidden.

"You have done a great service for me, Mr. Strong," said Vigil, "and have refused a monetary reward. I would like to return that service, if possible. I have nearly forty men working here at the mine. I would like to offer you the services of a dozen of them in getting your cattle."

"Thank you," responded Ted. "I think I will accept your offer. There is little doubt but that we will experience considerable trouble in getting our cattle, as I understand the entrance to the Oajaca Valley is rigidly guarded by the bandits. We may have to fight our way through them."

"I have one man, by name Gonzales, who is a great fighter. He knows the country hereabouts like a book. I will tell him to pick out eight or ten men, whom he thinks he can depend upon, and report with them to you," said Fernando, leaving the house and starting off toward the mine.

Had the young rough rider but known it, he and his friends would have been much better off had they refused the offer of Fernando Vigil to lend some of his men to assist in getting the cattle

The man whom Fernando had called Gonzales was no other than——

But this is getting ahead of the story.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE AMBUSH.

Gonzales proved to be a big, rawboned Mexican, lanky of limb, and broad across the shoulders.

He had the small, beadlike, shifting eyes of his race, and the black, straight hair.

It was shortly after breakfast when he reported to Ted, and informed the young rough rider that he had picked out ten good men to make the trip under Ted's orders.

He said that his employer, Fernando Vigil, had explained all about the stolen cattle; that the men he had selected for the work knew all about the dangers in store for them, and had joined the expedition willingly.

"Do you know the way to Oajaca Valley?" asked Gonzales.

"No," replied Ted, "but my companion, Ben Tremont, who will accompany us, knows the way."

A shadow passed across the countenance of Gonzales.

Ted did not know that the man's question had been asked for a purpose, and, therefore, did not guess that the man was annoyed by learning that one of Ted's party knew the way to reach the valley.

The distance to the Oajaca Valley from the Vigil Mine was not over twelve miles. Half of the distance the party were certain of finding difficult and slow traveling, but the rest of the distance was not hard.

They knew that they should be able to reach the canyon leading into the valley by the middle of the afternoon at the latest.

As little time was lost as possible in making the start, and, as they met with no delays during the trip, Ted and his party arrived at the entrance to the canyon shortly after noon.

Here Ted called a halt for dinner.

Although none of the party had caught sight of any of the bandits, nor had seen any indications of the villains being in the vicinity, Ted was certain that before night they would meet some of their foes.

But with the re-enforcements of the eleven men from Vigil's mine, Ted felt assured that his party would succeed in penetrating to the valley before dark.

He did not suspect that the men who had come with his party, ostensibly to aid him in reaching the valley and in fighting the members of Anita's gang, were even now plotting against himself and his friends.

But such was the case, as Ted was to learn shortly.

Immediately after dinner, Ted ordered that the march into the canyon be commenced.

The canyon, Ted had been informed, was less than a mile in length.

The party, under Ted's leadership, had proceeded about half the distance when the first incident of an alarming nature took place.

Ted was riding in the lead, and he was followed immediately by Ben Tremont, Bud Morgan, Bob Martin, Ralph Hobart, and Max Morton. Behind Max rode Gonzales, and Gonzales was followed by the rest of the men from the mine.

When the party had advanced about halfway through the canyon, Ted Strong suddenly heard a ringing voice ahead.

He had been alert ever since the party had entered the canyon, and had seen the owner of the voice before the person had spoken.

Ted was not taken by surprise. He was looking for something, such as now had happened, at any moment.

The man who had spoken was a Mexican, and he was standing upon a ledge of rocks directly ahead of the path along which Ted was advancing.

His words had been: "Pull in your horse, señor. You are headed the wrong way. You cannot get through here!"

As the man spoke, other men came into sight. All held weapons toward the party of rough riders.

Ted reined in his horse, and then turned to give directions to his followers. He had expected to have to fight, and was now resolved to make a bold dash toward the desperadoes, rush them from their position, and put them to flight.

But a great surprise was in order for Ted.

As he turned in his saddle to address his friends and the re-enforcements from the mine, he suddenly discovered that Gonzales and his men had drawn up in line in the rear, and were sitting motionless in their saddles.

At the shoulder of each man under Gonzales had been raised a rifle, and each man was taking direct aim at the young rough rider!

"What does this mean?" asked Ted, in astonishment.

"It means," rang out the voice of Gonzales, "that happily we have outwitted you. You thought that we were going to help you fight our own friends. I may as well tell you all about it, for you will never return to civilization alive. Myself and all of the men with me are members of the Cóahuila Demons. We have only one leader, and she is our Queen Anita. She has sworn vengeance against you. She has already sworn that you must die, and she has never failed to keep an oath!"

This was, indeed, a startling *dénouement*. The young rough riders were trapped. They had been outwitted.

"Let's shoot 'em up!" exclaimed Bud Morgan, indignantly.

"No," replied Ted. "We must surrender. We are between two fires. If we resist, we could probably succeed in killing off some of the villains; but we would finally be killed ourselves. Let us surrender, and then rely upon our wits and our good luck to escape in some way later."

Ted was not cowardly, but he was diplomatic. His reasoning was good. While his men and himself might have succeded in punishing many of their foes, it was certain that none of his party could succeed in escaping death in the end should they start a fight.

"You are right, Ted," said Bob Martin. "As my old friend Shakespeare used to say: 'Where there is life, there is hope,' but when a man's dead, he must take big chances!"

Within five minutes Ted and his party had been disarmed, and had been bound hand and foot.

When this had been accomplished, the desperadoes in the canyon came up and joined Gonzales and his followers, The men met as if they were old friends. It was plain to be seen that Gonzales had spoken the truth when he had proclaimed himself and his followers to be members of Anita's gang.

And it was also plain to be seen that Gonzales was an important member of the band, that he had considerable authority, for all of the men treated him with unusual respect. He gave several orders which were carried out without hesitancy, showing that the men were used to obeying him.

From remarks which were made, Hobart, who could understand much of the doggerel Spanish used, made out and informed Ted that Gonzales was regarded as the lover and future husband of the Mexican girl, Anita.

A few minutes after Ted and his friends had been

bound, Gonzales approached the place where Ted Strong and Ben Tremont were sitting upon the ground.

"Now, young men," he said, his lip curled in a sneer, "you probably realize how foolish you were to come here after those cattle. I don't mind telling you that I was one of the men who stole those cattle from the Los Animas Ranch, and you are the skunks who queered the bargain my partner made to dispose of them."

Here a fiendish look came into the man's eyes, and he shook a long, brown finger in Ben Tremont's face.

"We have had you spotted for some time. I have the permission of Anita to shoot you on sight," the man continued, "and that is just exactly what I am going to do right now."

Then Gonzales turned toward Ted.

"I know you," he exclaimed. "You are the manager of the Los Animas Ranch. You are more to blame than this other fellow, for he was acting only under your directions, I am going to shoot you, too!"

After these threats, Gonzales backed away a few yards and drew his weapons. He was evidently about to shoot the two young rough riders immediately, but suddenly seemed to change his mind.

He turned and gave some orders to several of his men, who were standing idly about watching the sport and smoking cigarettes.

Four of the men stepped forward and raised Ted to his feet, and carried him to a small tree several yards away. There they tied him securely to the trunk of the tree in a standing position, and then moved away.

Gonzales took one of his revolvers in his hand, and advanced to within a few feet of Ted.

"I am going to shoot you first," said the Mexican, "and your big partner later. Are you ready to die?"

Ted did not reply. Little difference what answer he might give.

Gonzales waited a moment, and then raised his revolver and pressed the trigger!

There was an instant report!

At that moment the spectators were astonished by a woman's scream, from a short distance up the gulch.

They looked around. Coming toward them, at a mad gallop, was Anita, the desperadoes' queen.

There was an agonized look upon her face. She had seen Gonzales' shot.

"My God fool!" she exclaimed, leaping from her horse. "You have killed him, and your life must pay for his!"

As the Mexican girl spoke she drew her revolver from her sash, and, springing toward Gonzales, she shoved the weapon squarely in his face and pulled the trigger!

The man fell to the ground a dead weight!

He had been killed instantly! A red spot upon his forehead showed where the bullet from Anita's revolver had entered.

CHAPTER XV.

A TREATY WITH ANITA.

That Anita had great authority and control of her followers was demonstrated when she fired the shot that killed Gonzales.

Not a man stepped forward to interfere with her as she made the attack.

After Gonzales had fallen, she advanced toward his dead, prostrate form and gave him a hateful kick.

"Good!" she exclaimed. "The dog is dead. I will never again be troubled with his fateful attentions."

Then she rushed toward the tree where Ted Strong had been tied for a target by Gonzales.

Ted had apparently been shot dead. His hands were hanging limply at his side, and his head hung low down over his chest. He was sustained, in a partially upright position, by the cords which passed around his body and bound him to the tree.

As she rushed toward Ted's limp body, she gave several hurried commands to several of the men, and they came to her aid at once.

She made them cut the cords which bound Ted, and lay his body carefully down upon a grassy spot.

Then she knelt over the body of the young rough rider, felt of his brow and of his hands. Then she laid her ear down upon his breast.

She started up quickly then, with an exclamation of joy upon her lips:

"He lives! He is not dead!" she exclaimed.

Hurriedly she dispatched one of her men for water, and when he had brought it she began bathing Ted's face and neck.

Shortly Ted opened his eyes.

As he returned to consciousnss, the outlaw queen wept for joy. She threw herself upon Ted's body and began kissing his face and eyes.

"Oh, my love, my love!" she exclaimed. "I thought that you had been killed. See," she shouted, pointing toward the body of Gonzales, "there is the dog who shot at you! I killed him for the offense!"

As the girl continued talking excitedly, Ted began to regain his senses and was soon able to sit up.

"Gonzales was a poor marksman," said the girl, running her small fingers through Ted's hair. "His aim was too high. See, the bullet merely skimmed across your scalp, just enough to render you unconscious."

Ted was looking at the girl wonderingly. Her actions were indeed strange. Was she still hoping to gain his love? Did she hope to become his wife?

If Anita had been a mind reader, her next sentence could not have been more in line with Ted's thoughts.

"I saved your life, my brave hero," said the girl, "but, even so, I have given up hope of gaining your love. I know you will not make me your wife. But I love you so much!

"I have learned now who you are. I have talked with one of the men who stole your cattle, the one who helped Gonzales run them off your ranch and bring them here. He has told me all. I know now that you spoke the truth when you said that you were not in this country for the purpose of searching for the treasure of Obigia. You are Ted Strong. You and your companions came to get the cattle which were stolen from your ranch."

The girl paused and looked at Ted, as if for a corroboration of her words.

"You are right," he said.

"You are a brave man, señor, and I respect you as such. Oh, that I had such a man as you for a husband. I would forsake this evil life and be a good woman."

Here the girl hid her face in her hands, and her body shook with emotions.

Ted placed his hand kindly upon the girl's shoulder, and she looked up with a grateful expression upon her face. Ted's words were kind ones:

"You are young, Anita, and beautiful. Most of your life is before you. Why cannot you now become a good woman, and make yourself worthy of a true and brave husband?"

The girl was visibly affected by Ted's words.

"You are right, señor," she finally said. "Such a creature as I am is not worthy of a good, true husband's love. Ah, yes. You are right. But how am I to change my life—my ways?"

"You were not always a wicked woman, Anita?" asked Ted.

"No," answered the girl, thoughtfully.

Then she glanced about her, as if to see if any of her men were near enough to hear her conversation.

They were all out of earshot of her low tones. She looked up at Ted and said:

"Mine has been a strange life, señor full of excitement. I should have been born a man. Would you like to hear my story? I can make it short."

Ted nodded his assent.

Then the girl told a strange tale to the young rough rider. Her words were addressed to Ted alone, but Ben Tremont, Bud Morgan, and the two young Easterners were close enough to hear every word she said.

Briefly, Anita's story was as follows:

She had been born of wealthy parents in the City of Mexico, and had been reared in luxury until the age of ten. Then, through some kind of speculation, her father had lost his fortune. Soon after that her mother had died.

When twelve years of age, the girl had attracted the notice of a rich American lady, who was traveling with a party of friends through Mexico. This lady had offered to adopt the young Mexican beauty, and Anita's father had consented. The girl had been taken to Brooklyn, and had there been educated and refined.

But she had always longed to return to her native land. Two years before this story opens, her adopted mother had consented to let her visit the scenes of her childhood, and had accompanied Anita to Mexico.

For several months they remained in Anita's native country, and then the lady announced her intention of returning to Brooklyn.

Anita dreaded to go back to the United States. The day before the time set for starting on the return trip, she resolved to run away. This she did, flying to the mountains.

The stage in which Anita was traveling from one town to another, in the interior of Mexico, was held up by a gang of road agents. Attracted by her beauty, the robbers had carried the girl away to their stronghold.

On her arrival at the robbers' permanent camp, Anita was astonished to find that her own father was the leader of the band of desperadoes.

At his command she was immediately released and given permission to return to civilization, but she pleaded so hard to be allowed to remain with the bandits that at last the father consented.

She soon became expert with the use of the lariat, revolver, and rifle, and could ride like the best of her father's men.

When during a train hold up, a month after she had

adopted the life of the bandits, her father had been killed, she had been unanimously elected to take his place as the leader of the gang.

"And now you have had enough of it, and would like to return to civilization?" asked Ted, when the girl had finished her story.

"Yes, I would," replied Anita, "if I had any means of support."

At this minute Ralph Hobart, who had been talking earnestly with Max Morton, spoke up:

"I beg your pardons, but I would like to say a few words of great importance to Mr. Strong. May I?"

His question was addressed to the girl.

Anita nodded her head.

Ted approached the spot where Hobart was sitting, still bound.

He listened to what Hobart had to say, and then returned to where Anita was sitting.

"Anita," said Ted, "if you are willing to forsake this evil life which you are leading, and will promise to return to civilization with us and reform, I am authorized to make you a very liberal proposition."

"I am ready to do anything that you suggest, señor," replied the girl.

"Then the proposition is this: My young friend, Max Morton, has a paper giving directions for finding the treasure of Obigia. He has listened to your story, and he says that if you will see that we are not disturbed in getting the treasure and in bringing out the stolen cattle, and will promise to return with us to the United States for the purpose of leading a reformed life, that he will make you a present of one-fifth of the treasure. Of course, we cannot tell how valuable it is; but from the Spanish letter, which you have already read, we have reason to believe that your share would be more than enough to keep you comfortably the rest of your life."

As Ted spoke, a joyful look came over the girl's face. Before he had finished talking, Ted knew that Anita was ready to accept the terms of the proposition,

"Thank the young man for me," said Anita. "I accept the proposition. I will send the men off on a wild-goose chase, and will go with them to see that they do not return. I will meet you in the town of Socorro at noon the day after to-morrow!"

Thus speaking, Anita moved toward her men and began giving them directions. They were all soon mounted and following their girl leader up the canyon in the opposite direction from the valley.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TREASURE OF OBIGIA.

As soon as Anita and her followers had disappeared from sight, Ted attended to releasing his companions.

They all found their weapons in a pile where Anita had directed them to be placed, and, within a few minutes, all were mounted and headed toward the Oajaca Valley.

But it was dark by the time they rode out of the canyon into the beautiful, mountain-lined valley, and they knew that they could accomplish no work that night.

They prepared supper, and, posting watches as on the previous nights spent in the open air, retired.

In the morning, however, no time was lost in getting to work.

Anita was keeping her word. They were not disturbed by any of her bandits.

On what pretense she had lured them away was not known, and the girl never later explained.

The work of searching for and rounding up the cattle was the first task commenced, and it proved to be a much harder task than they had imagined.

The valley was not wide, but it was long, and there were many small ravines leading into, but not through, the bordering mountains.

The cattle were scattered, and the rough riders found it necessary to explore almost every one of these ravines before rounding up the whole herd. Even then it was found that six of the cattle were missing. They had either died of exhaustion on their long journey from the Los Animas Ranch, or had been killed by the bandits for food.

But Ted was satisfied with finding most of his herd.

The cattle were in excellent condition, too. There was good grass in the valley, and the cattle had grown plump and fat.

Ted would much rather that the cattle had been thinner, however, for they could then better withstand the long trip home. He knew that the journey back to the Los Animas Ranch must be a very slow one, indeed.

It was the middle of the afternoon before the cattle were finally bunched in readiness for the start home.

The rough riders were tired and would willingly have postponed the search for the treasure until the next morning, but Ted knew that Ralph Hobart and Max Morton were impatient to begin the search.

The boys had worked hard to help the rough riders find and get the cattle together, and Ted did not wish to disappoint them.

So when the cattle were bunched near the entrance to the canyon, he gave Bob Martin and Bud Morgan orders to watch the cattle, while Ben Tremont and himself went with the boys to search for the treasure.

"Now, Ben," said Ted, as the four started away, "I think you said a while ago that you know where the Eagle's Nest Rock is located. We are expecting you to make good on that statement."

Ben paused for a moment and looked thoughtfully in every direction, as if to take his bearings.

Then he pointed off to the west, toward the head of the valley.

"It is lower than some of these peaks," he said, "but it is somewhere in that direction."

The Eagle's Nest Rock was not on any of the mountains immediately bordering the valley.

Ben finally located it between two mountain points, half a mile back of the bordering mountain walls, and the young men found that to gain the rock they would have to do some tedious climbing.

It lacked but a few minutes of sundown, when at last, footsore and weary, the four young men were standing in a strangely shaped hollow of a giant bowlder known as Eagle's Nest Rock.

Then Hobart produced the letter of directions, given to Max by the dying Mexican in the Grand Rapids, Michigan, hospital.

He read it slowly to his listening companions, while Morton stood near with the spyglass in his hands.

"'From Eagle's Nest Rock look directly to the east,'" read Ralph, "'through the V-shaped slit.'"

"Through the V-shaped slit! Why, that must be through that crack in the mountain over there, through which we climbed to reach this range," exclaimed Ben Tremont.

Ben pointed to the east, and the rest of the party were quick to note the slit to which Ben referred. It was V-shaped, and through it the party could look down into the valley they had left.

Morton raised the glass to his eyes, and aimed it toward the crack in the mountain which Ben had pointed out.

For several moments he gazed. Then he lowered the glass, a disappointed expression upon his face.

"I can see nothing that looks like a blazed cross," he exclaimed. "There is nothing in sight but some rocks, some grass, and a tree."

"Let me look," said Ted, taking the spyglass in his hand and placing it to his eyes.

Ted aimed the glass toward the tree which Max had mentioned.

There was a slight wind stirring in the valley, and Ted could see the leaves upon that lone tree tremble. He looked long and earnestly at the tree. He half expected to see a crude cross blazed upon its trunk.

But he was mistaken.

He was almost about to give up his search when the wind moved some leaves among the topmost branches of the tree, disclosing to Ted's view a small, blazed cross upon one of the smaller branches!

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Ted. "I see the cross!"

He handed the spyglass to Hobart, explaining where to look for the cross, and a second later Hobart also caught a glimpse of it as the breeze stirred the leaves.

Then Ben and Max, in turn, looked through the spyglass.

"What are the next directions?" asked Ted.

"Cut the string which holds the iron ball," Hobart said, referring to the letter.

"The iron ball must be suspended from the branch of the tree," said Ted. "Let me see if I can see it with the glass."

Ted and each of the other members of the party looked long and searchingly at the tree for the iron ball, but they could not discover it.

"Well, the only thing to do is to 'hike' to the tree and investigate," said Ted.

"Will we know the tree if we see it again?" asked Hobart.

"Yes," replied Ted. "It is all alone by itself, and is about two miles down the valley from the opening to the canyon."

The four friends hastened to get back over the mountain and into the valley, as darkness was approaching. The return trip was much easier than the climb they had made to gain the Eagle's Nest Rock, and they were back to where Bob and Bud were guarding the cattle shortly after dark.

Ted proposed that a supper be cooked and eaten before further investigations were made. It would be moonlight quite early that night.

In the light of a full, mellow, Southern moon, the four friends set out to find the tree with the blazed limb.

It was not a hard task to find the tree, and when they had found it Ted advised that either Hobart or Morton should climb to the blazed branch and look for the iron ball.

Hobart made the climb, and he found suspended from the limb on which the cross had been blazed a rusty, iron ball.

The ball was suspended by a small, wire string, and rested against the further side of a small limb a few feet below the blazed cross.

That was probably the reason the boys had been unable to find it with the spyglass.

When Hobart had announced his discovery, Ted asked: "Can you cut the wire string?"

"Sure," was the answer.

"Then cut it off, and let the ball drop straight down."

This was done, and the three men on the ground gathered eagerly about the spot where the heavy ball had dropped. They were soon joined by Hobart.

"Now for the rest of the directions," suggested Ted.

"From the spot where the ball strikes the earth, take seven paces to the southwest. The treasure of Obigia lies hidden in the wall of rock, in a secret niche, behind the loose stone."

As Hobart read the directions, Ted referred to his little pocket compass and began stepping off the seven paces.

He was closely followed by the other three boys.

When Ted had measured the seventh step, he found himself close beside the mountain wall.

"Now, to find the loose stone," he exclaimed.

Ted drew his revolver from his belt, and with the butt of it he began thumping the face of the rock.

Suddenly his revolver rap gave off a hollow sound.

Ted stooped to the ground and, lighting a match, examined carefully the face of the rock. He soon found what seemed to be a seam in the smooth stone.

He drew his knife and ran the edge of it into this seam.

A second later his knife blade had penetrated the seam and pried open a section of the rock.

With his hands Ted now pulled the loosened rock to one side.

Ben Tremont had lit a match, and he now held the flame close to the opening which had been made by the removal of the slab of rock.

As the small niche was lighted up, a cry of surprise came from each of the onlookers. The sight they saw almost dazzled their eyes.

In a small, lidless, iron box rested the treasure of Obigia, and that it was valuable beyond all expectations none of the party doubted.

The treasure consisted mostly of uncut stones—diamonds, emeralds, and rubies, with a few sapphires. Then there were a few articles of jewelry, gold set with precious stones, and a few gold coins, Spanish, and all of a very ancient date.

The boys had no trouble in carrying the treasure back to the camp.

Here, at the request of Max and Hobart, the jewels were divided among the rough riders, to place in their several saddlebags for transportation.

At Ted's invitation, Ralph and Hobart had agreed to journey back to the United States by the way of Dimmit County, Texas, and make the young rough riders a short visit at the Los Animas Ranch.

They expressed a wish to reward Ted and his friends for the assistance rendered in finding the treasure, but Ted refused the offer, graciously, but firmly.

The morning after the treasure was found the trip toward Socorro was started. On reaching that town, Ben Tremont ran across the ranchman who had come so near to buying Ted's cattle from the man who had helped to steal them.

He asked Ben if he thought Ted would sell them, and Ben conducted the ranchman to the young rough rider.

The Mexican was greatly pleased with the cattle, and desired to buy them. The cattle had been raised to sell, and, when the Mexican offered a good, fat price per head, Ted promptly closed a bargain.

Ted was rid of the disagreeable task of driving the cattle back to Texas.

Oh, yes—— The rough riders found Anita waiting for them at the hotel in Socorro that noon.

She was ready to accompany them back to civilization, and had broken her connection with the band of outlaws known as the Demons of Coahuila.

THE END.

The next issue, No. 64, will be entitled "Ted Strong's Terrible Test; or, Joining a Secret Clan." This is an account of other strange adventures Ted and his chums experienced before leaving Mexico. It tells of how the members of the organization known as the Demons of Coahuila resented Anita's desertion, and of how the Mexican girl saved Ted from a terrible situation. It is an absorbing and thrilling story.

YOUNG ROUGH RIDERS WEEKLY

21—Ted Strong's Steadiness; or, The Cattle Rustlers of Ceriso.
22—Ted Strong's Land Boom; or, The Rush for a Homestead.
23—Ted Strong's Indian Trap; or, Matching Craft with Craft.
24—Ted Strong's Signal; or, Racing with Death.
25—Ted Strong's Stamp Mill; or, The Woman in Black.
26—Ted Strong's Recruit; or, A Hidden Foe.
27—Ted Strong's Discovery; or, The Rival Miners.
28—Ted Strong's Chase; or, The Young Rough Riders on the Trail.
29—Ted Strong's Enemy; or, An Uninvited Guest.
30—Ted Strong's Triumph; or, The End of the Contest.
31—Ted Strong in Nebraska; or, The Trail to Fremont.
32—Ted Strong in Kansas City; or, The Last of the Herd.
33—The Rough Riders in Missouri; or, In the Hands of His Enemy.
34—The Young Rough Riders in St. Louis; or, The League of the Camorra.
35—The Young Rough Riders in Indiana; or, The Vengeance of the Camorra.
36—The Young Rough Riders in Chicago; or, Bud Morgan's Day Off.
37—The Young Rough Riders in Kansas; or, The Trail of the Outlaw.
38—The Young Rough Riders in the Rockies; or, Fighting in Mid Air.
39—The Young Rough Rider's Foray; or, The Mad Horse of Raven Hill.
40—The Young Rough Rider's Fight to the Death; or, The Mad Hermit of Bear's Hole.
41—The Young Rough Rider's Indian Trail; or, Okanaga, the Chéyenne.
42—The Young Rough Rider's Double; or, Unmasking a Sham.
43—The Young Rough Rider's Vendetta; or, The House of the Sorceress.
44—Ted Strong in Old Mexico; or, The Haunted Hacienda.
45—The Young Rough Rider in California; or, The Owls of San Pablo.
46—The Young Rough Rider's Silver Mine; or, The Texas Giant.
47—The Young Rough Rider's Wildest Ride; or, Cleaning Out a Whole Town.
48—The Young Rough Rider's Girl Guide; or, The Maid of the Mountains.
49—The Young Rough Rider's Handicap; or, Fighting the Mormon Kidnapers.
50—The Young Rough Rider's Daring Climb; or, The Treasure of Copper Crag.
51—The Young Rough Rider's Bitterest Foe; or, The Challenge of Capt. Nemo.
52—The Young Rough Rider's Great Play; or, The Mad Ally of a Villain.
53—The Young Rough Rider Trapped; or, A Villain's Desperate Play.
54—The Young Rough Rider's Still-Hunt; or, The Mystery of Dead Man's Pass.
55—The Young Rough Rider's Close Call; or, The Girl From Denver.
56—The Young Rough Rider's Close Call; or, Life Against Life.
57—The Young Rough Rider's Silent Foe; or, The Hermit of Satan's Gulch.
58—The Young Rough Rider's River Route; or, A Fight Against Great Odds.
59—The Young Rough Rider's Investment; or, A Bargain With a Ghost.
60—The Young Rough Rider's Pledge; or, The Hermit of Hidden Haunt.
61—The Young Rough Rider's Aërial Voyage; or, The Stranded Circus.
62—Ted Strong's Nebraska Ranch; or, The Fracas at Fullerton.
63—Ted Strong's Treasure Hunt; or, The Demons of Coahuila.
64—Ted Strong's Terrible Test; or, Joining a Secret Clan.
65—The Young Rough Riders in Shakerag Canyon; or, Routing the Rustlers of the Big Horn.
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